A Retreat for Priests

By
REV. WALTER ELLIOTT
of the Paulist Fathers

A RETREAT FOR PRIESTS

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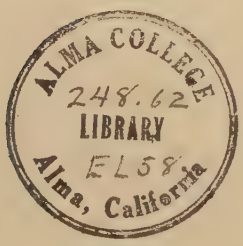
By
REVEREND WALTER ELLIOTT
OF THE PAULIST FATHERS



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The Author of this book having given many Retreats to the Diocesan clergy now publishes his notes. As the Retreats seemed acceptable both to the Priests and their Bishops, he hopes they may be of use in permanent form. It will be observed that he includes Conferences on what are termed the Great Eternal Truths, namely, the Value of the Soul, Mortal Sin, the Lessons of Death, God's Judgments, Eternal Punishment, the Passion of Christ, the Happiness of Heaven, God's Mercy to Sinners, the Intercession of Mary. These are the foundation and inspiration of Retreats.

Besides giving Retreats to the clergy, the author spent many years domiciled with them preaching missions to Catholics and non-Catholics. He ever loved them, admired their virtues, and to the last grew in his estimate of their vocation.

He has undertaken this work out of obedience to his superiors.

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A RETREAT FOR PRIESTS

PART I

CHAPTER I

The Soul

"For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? And what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"—(Matt. xvi, 26).

WHO knows the soul's worth equal to Him Who asks these momentous questions, the Son of God Who created it, Who assumed a human soul at His Incarnation, and Who died a bitter death on Calvary to save men's souls. And He proclaims that one human soul outvalues the whole world; that there is nothing in earth or heaven precious enough to be placed in the balance against it. This wisdom He gives us in the form of a question, as if defying contradiction, there being but one inevitable and transparently plain answer: our soul's salvation is beyond all price and calculation.

One might be tempted to say that this teaching of our

Redeemer applies only to those monstrous men who have aspired literally to rule the whole world, Alexander, Cæsar and Napoleon. But no conqueror of nations ever coveted empire more greedily than many an ordinary man has coveted money, or plotted and schemed to be released from honest toil. Spiritual welfare is too often postponed to a vague future, whilst the really earnest endeavor of life is expended on something far different. The Lord's teaching has a universal and very practical application. The interests of the soul must be absolutely paramount.

Consider first the native excellence of the soul, the intrinsic and essential superiority of the spiritual life to all else in this world.

Have you never heard of persons who value their clothes more highly than their health? Now the body is but the clothing of the soul. The body is doomed to rot in the grave, the soul—if it keeps God's law—is destined to shine resplendent in heaven. Yet how often does the body outrank the soul in men's esteem. Have you never contrasted praying with eating and drinking? Who lingers so fondly at his prayers as he does at the table? Which of us dwells as intently upon the life of Christ (who loved our souls unto death) as he pores over the pages of a novel.

The soul lives forever, and all its actions are eternal for weal or woe. When I lift my hand and make the sign of the cross, my soul makes my eternal sign manual of allegiance to the sovereign majesty of the living God. My body feeds upon perishable things like itself; my soul's food is every word that falls from the lips of God (Matt. iv, 4). Shall God's truth ever die, or His wis-

dom or His love? These are the daily bread of a right living soul. Or if it be a wicked soul, it mocks its divine hunger by feeding on the beastly things of sin, as did the Prodigal Son: "He fain would have filled his belly with husks the swine did eat" (Luke xv, 16). Thus acts a man who by his sinfulness mocks the dignity of his immortal soul. The very instincts of reason revolt against the choice of perishable things in preference to those eternal things of the soul.

Immortality is to our soul what breath is to our body, essential to existence. About our soul the prophet says to God, "Thou hast crowned him with glory and with honor" (Ps. viii, 6). The eternal honor of God is committed to us, His royal standard, the cross, is placed in our right hand, in order that in our soul's thoughts and words and acts we may do him eternal honor.

Consider our soul's dignity of knowledge. We know the heavens and the earth as a man knows his own farm. To our soul the heavens proclaim the glory of God. And through the visible earth and heavens above our soul pierces into the depths of the deity itself—the eye of the body sees things, the soul sees their meaning—sees the invisible God—through knowledge of creatures the soul attains to the infinite Creator.

A holy soul lives everywhere; the entire universe is its possession. He is the salt of the earth; he is the light of the world. His voice goeth forth to the ends of the earth unto salvation of his fellow men. A sinful soul is often the contagion of death to uncounted multitudes. His bad example is a universal plague, poisoning the vital thoughts of generations. His scandal will last to the end of the world and into the eternal ages beyond.

No mystery of science is so little understood by the average man as the most patent of all realities—the mysterious dignity of his own soul. Many a man never realizes that he has a soul—that he is an immortal being. The first lesson he learns after death is that (besides God) the only thing with whose existence he is concerned is that he is an immortal spirit.

Nothing in earth or heaven is so noble as the soul of man. Would you prefer an angel to him? Yea by mere nature, for of man's soul it is said, "Thou hast made him a little less than an angel" (Ps. viii, 5). But by highest predestination? O God, Thou hast made a son of man Thy only Begotten Son: "To which of His angels hath He said: Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee?" (Heb. i, 13.) Nay, more; consider what the angel Gabriel said to the Mother of Jesus: "Therefore the holy (Son) that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke i, 35). Hence our Redeemer though He was the Son of the living God most usually called Himself the Son of Man.

So far we have seen the intrinsic worth of the soul. Let us now study the soul's origin, the design of its Maker, and the model he chose in forming it. God said: Let *Us* make man to our image and likeness...and God created man to His own image" (Gen. i, 2, 6, 27). Now mark how well God has in man made a being who shall resemble Himself, see how closely your soul resembles Him. It is immense enough to hold the infinite God in the close embrace of knowledge and love. You are eternal enough to live as long as God. You are good enough, if you will, to become the joy of the all blissful deity. You are capable of love noble enough to be content with nothing less than

closest union with God. "All the rivers run into the sea" says the Sage, "yet the sea doth not overflow" (Eccles. i, 7). If all the joy and glory and wealth of the world in all its ages could be poured at once into your soul, it yet would not overflow—it would not, it could not be content. The infinite, eternal God alone can content us. For our capacity to know and to love and to be happy is too closely fashioned after the divine model to be content with less than God—the entire, and blessful, and eternal possession of the Deity itself. In the soul of every man there is an aching void that can be filled by God and by Him alone. But dare I intrude this thought upon you? Namely, that the blemish and smirch of sin makes the soul of man sort of an infinite caricature of God its Creator and its Model.

Consider a statue that is an artist's masterpiece, and then note its difference from the original; an essential difference—the statue has not life. It has beautiful form, and grace and dignity. But after all it is dead stone. Now you are the image of God. And O you have life. God's life is in you. Something of the divine life has been breathed into you, a holy breath of love and power emanating from the deeper depths of God's heart. "And thy renown went forth among the nations for thy beauty, for thou wast perfect through My beauty, which I had placed upon them, saith the Lord God" (Ezeck. xvi, 14).

Herein is an appalling responsibility. The great trust of every man's life is the care of something most precious which does not belong to him—his soul. It belongs to God who made it; who keeps it alive every moment of its existence; destines it for His service here on earth,

and for His joys in heaven hereafter; Who has not once but many times saved it from everlasting misery; never lets it out of His sight for so much as one moment. O my God, if I am not thine, then in dire reality, everything in heaven and on earth *is* Thine, except my unhappy soul.

My soul is related to God as my words are to my thoughts. The thought of God will forever occupy it; the name of God will forever fill it with joy or with agony. O what great thoughts shall fill a mind made like unto God's mind. The Psalmist exclaims: "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what great things He hath done for my soul" (Ps. lxv, 16).

Do you want to injure God, yea even God? Then strike Him in His living image, your own soul. Do it by mortal sin. Do you want to honor God? Do it by adorning your soul with the royal robes of divine love.

Thus is the soul precious as a creature of God, and a child of God. Its dignity is known by its intrinsic excellence and the unspeakable glory of its origin. But another evidence of the soul's worth is the great price that was paid for its ransom from the slavery of sin.

Take an example from the history of King David (2 Kings xxiii, 15-17). David with a small band of followers was a fugitive from King Saul, hiding in caves near his own little city of Bethlehem, which was at that time in possession of the Philistines; and he was unable to get even good water to drink. "And David longed and said: O that some man would get me a drink of water out of the well that is in Bethlehem by the gate." And the three valiant men broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that

was by the gate, and brought it to David; but he would not drink, but offered it to the Lord, saying: "The Lord be merciful to me, that I may not do this thing. Shall I drink the blood of these men that went at the peril of their lives? Therefore he would not drink." Water is the cheapest of all food, and now it had become as precious to King David as a brave man's blood, for by blood had it been bought. David saw their wounds trickling blood, and their fainting forms; and he knew their noble love for him; and all this showed him the worth of the water they had fought for and had brought him. What! he exclaimed, shall I drink the blood of these men? Yet he was speaking of water. Therefore does St. Paul exclaim about the blood of Christ: "Ye are bought with a great price" (1 Cor. vi, 20). God's Only begotten Son saw in your soul all His Father's beauty and glory, defiled though it was by your sinfulness. He recognized it, and His divine heart was moved with compassion as one brother is moved by the missing of another—and He determined to save you, as the same apostle says: "A faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners" (1 Tim. i, 15). He saved you by shedding His blood for you; your soul is thereby made of equal value as the most precious blood of the Son of God, of which He Himself said the night before He was crucified: "This is My blood of the New Testment which shall be shed for you" (Mark xiv, 24). In calculating values the thing bought takes the very name of the price paid. My soul therefore takes the place in God's love of what He paid to recover possession of it, no less than the life's blood of Jesus Christ the Only Begotten of the Father.

O it is from God alone that we can rightly learn the worth of our souls. The school is that wintry cave of Bethlehem; the teacher is that divine Child and His holy mother. Ask Him, ask her, how much God values your soul, since He is born into this suffering life that your soul may be saved and may enjoy a life of eternal happiness.

Another school, aye, the very university of the knowledge of our soul's worth, is Calvary: "Greater love than this no man hath, than that he should give his life for his friends" (John xv, 13). These are the Savior's words spoken the evening before He died. Your soul is worth the death agony of the Son of God.

This dearest treasure of God we carry about in our open hand, and amid deadly enemies. Some are disguised as friends; cunning and flattering; others again are ambushed in our very thoughts—our animal passions, one down and another up in an instant, sudden and violent. And waylaying us at every turn are our Satanic enemies, raging like wild beasts. I am appalled at the soul's danger and the loss of souls all around us. But what can all these enemies do against us? If they were a thousandfold more powerful and more numerous the Son of God is never absent: His fidelity to our soul is what may be called a divine infatuation. That soul, He exclaims, is My own Father's child; next to Him it is my nearest blood relation—I must save him. With all his faults I will yet win his love. I will inspire him with my best graces. I will change all his tastes and transform his inclinations. If he will but let me I will surely save him.

O my God, I have dwelt upon the different titles by

which Thou dost own my soul—all except one. That title is my own gift of it to Thee. O my Father and my Savior and my God, I give Thee my soul and my heart, my body and my soul, all my thoughts and my affections and my soul. Thine is my soul as well as by my free gift as by all thy own divine rights as my Creator and Redeemer, Thine now and forever more. Amen.

CHAPTER II

Mortal Sin [1]

"Sin, when it is completed, begetteth death."—(James i, 15).

SIN then, is the subject of our meditation, mortal sin, which is called the soul's death by St. James in our text, and in many other parts of holy scripture. We are not directly concerned with venial sin, therefore, which does not inflict spiritual death, being too light an offense to sever friendship with our Maker, and which often is the result of ignorance, or surprise or some natural defect of character. No, we are to consider grave violations of God's law.

Mortal sin is therefore any grave disobedience to God, any wilful violation of a commandment which we well know is to be observed as a test of our friendship for Him. Concerning such commandments, the Psalmist says: "In the head of the book it is written of me, that I should do Thy will, O God" (Ps. xxxix, 8). Graven on my very soul is that primary rule of reason and of religion: Keep God's commandments. Written there in the blood of my crucified Redeemer are these

[1]This is a subject whose meditation may influence us sympathetically rather than directly, which is true also of Death, Judgment, and Hell: all the same the word of the Apostle remains firm: "Let him that thinketh himself to stand take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. x. 12). And we are priests of that Redeemer Whose favorites were in His day—and yet are sinners of the foulest kind. Dealing with such ought to be our dearest privilege.

other words: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John xiv, 15). The whole burden of God's message to us through His holy Church is the same: observe the law of God your Creator and Redeemer and the Church's Father and Founder. Against all this does a man revolt when he commits mortal sin. With the rebel angels he proclaims his independence of God and violates His commandments, outrages his interior sense of right, smothers the voice of conscience, shames the Church of which he is so unworthy a member. And he says to Jesus Christ—in effect at least: Thou sayest to me, If thou lovest Me, keep My commandments; and I answer Thee that I will not keep Thy commandments for I do not love Thee.

Let us study the horrible guilt of this conduct, which does a deadly injury to the sinner's own soul, and which is an indescribable insolent affront to God.

I

Consider attentively the word mortal, for it means deadly. What happens when a man commits murder? He struck a mortal blow, it is said; and then it is told how his victim expired. So does one strike his own soul a death-dealing blow by mortal sin. Again you know the difference between an ordinary illness and a mortal malady; in one case the sick man suffers and gets well; and in the other he suffers and he dies. So does a man spiritually expire when he commits mortal sin, for God's love, the life of his soul, departs from him.

What this state of spiritual death means you may know from considering its opposite, the state of a soul in God's friendship. Thus, for example, a pure souled married man thinks of the sin of adultery as if it were

literally death—he hates it worse than death, he is ready to put to death the man who would accuse him of having committed it; one who would tempt him to go to a brothel he would consider his deadly enemy. Is that man right? Does he rate mortal sin truly when he names it along with death?—even with the everlasting death of the soul, fearing it and hating it with life and death energy? Indeed a good man fears nothing else except mortal sin. St. Hilarion in an early Christian age, was called by God to a solitary life of prayer. He chose for his hermitage a spot on the seashore of Palestine. His friends said to him: "This is the resort of murderers and robbers." But the saint answered: "I fear them not: I fear nothing but mortal sin, the eternal death of my soul."

All men abhor suicide, and they are amazed at the frightful ingenuity of men in choosing ways of self-destruction. One man blows his brains out, another thrusts a knife into his own heart, again, a dispairing creature drinks poison, and yet another leaps to death into the river, and occasionally we hear of one starving himself to death. It is not different with spiritual self-destruction, for as many and as various as these are the ways of soul suicide—a sudden rush into filthy mortal sin; or a cunningly planned soul destruction; or again the defiant and shameless crime of sacrilege or blasphemy. Some destroy their souls by open eyed wickedness, and some by hypocritical villainy. So teaches holy writ: "They themselves lie in wait for their own blood, and practice deceits against their own souls" (Prov. i, 18).

In certain austere orders, when a new member is professed, he goes through the ceremony of his own funeral; he lies prostrate before the altar as if he were dead, a

black pall is spread upon him, and the monks chant a solemn dirge over him as if he had departed this life and was a corpse about to be carried to his grave. You know that all this is to show that in entering the monastery that man died to the outside world, remembering it for the future only in his prayers. But what think you of a man who enters the death temple of mortal sin, turning his back on God and God's Church and people, prostrating himself slavishly before Satan's shrine, lying there before him as obedient and helpless as a corpse, in due time to be carried to hell, the charnal house of the souls who died in mortal sin.

The sinner seems, indeed, to be a living man after his transgression as much as before. But so does the right arm that is paralyzed seem to be alive, till its owner would wish to move it. Then it is shown to be flesh and bone without nerves. So is the sinner a dead member of Christ and of His Church. His life of love flows freely in others all about him, among his relatives and friends. But it stops at him who is but a mere mockery of a Christian, a ghastly corpselike soul, without a thrill of love, without the least response to God's fatherly call to repentance. Of such a one did our Redeemer speak these terrible words: "I know thy works, that thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead" (Apoc. iii, 1).

Mortal sin is called death for another reason, namely, because "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. vi, 23). Its penalty is the death penalty. If the sinner were truly aware of his guilt his house would be to him like a prison and his room the death-cell of a culprit condemned to be hanged and awaiting the hour of execution. O why should God permit a man to live who insolently defies

Him? Verily this is the sin of eternal death doom, the crime deserving capital punishment in eternal death. He rejects Jesus Christ and chooses Satan for his master, and now there falls upon him the dreadful fate promulgated by the Apostle: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema" (1 Cor. xvi, 22).

And furthermore, mortal sin is the death of all merit. Have you not seen a fruit tree blown down and lying upon the ground, but with a few poor roots still fixed in the soil? There are still some half faded leaves upon its branches, and some puny fruit is formed there, destined never to be ripened. The next spring the orchard will be fragrant with blossoms but this tree will be gone, cut out and carted off and burnt, root and branch, leaf and flower and fruit—dead and gone forever. So it is with the sinner. Some little show of virtue still linders about him, and he is still in the orchard, that is to say in the company of the Christian people, who are all about him alive with God's love and bearing good fruit of virtue. There he remains a shame and a cumbrance to them and to God, till at the time of the harvest he is dragged away to hell.

II

We have so far seen how mortal sin is the self-inflicted death of the soul, the injury done to the sinner's self. Now let us consider the hateful injury he does to God.

Sinners have but a vague notion of their wrong doing. They but dimly realize that they are all the time dealing with a divine Person, and that in their wickedness they are always face to face with the infinite God—as one being puts himself into antagonism with another. Would

that they appreciated that by mortal sin a man resists God—God, Who is the power by which that man lives, the eternity during which he must exist, God, the only being who can make him happy in the endless ages of the future; his Creator, his Redeemer, his Master and his Judge, that sovereign Majesty "in whom we live, and move and are" (Acts xvii, 28). He it is that the sinner rejects, dishonors, betrays and defies. This he does standing in the very presence of God. A human enemy you may hide from; or you may deal him a deadly blow from behind. Not so with God, for the sinner is not more present to his own self than he is to that God whose commandments he has basely violated. "Shall a man be hid in secret places and I not see him, saith the Lord" (Jer. xxxiii, 24).

Remember, too, that it is at God's own expense that the sinner betrays Him. Did not Judas feed at Our Lord's table, and then rise up and sell Him to His mortal enemies? Does any sinner do otherwise? Every sinner is dressed in the Lord's raiment, namely his body and his senses, which he uses as the very instruments of his perfidy against His generous Father. "Father, give me the portion of substance that falleth to me" (Luke xv, 12) he insultingly cries out to his infinite Creator and Master. Give me my body for sensuality and excess, give me my hopes of salvation for presumption upon Thy mercy, give me money and time, life and existence, that by their means I may despise Thee and disgrace Thee and crucify Thy Son by my sins. As for Thy commandments: "I have broken Thy yoke, and I have burst Thy bond, and I have said: I will not serve" (Jer. ii, 20).

God thus beholds His own child turned into his deadly

foe, and misusing against His honor the gifts He has lavished on him. The eternal Father well may say to men and angels: Look upon My child outraging My holy truth with the tongue I gave him. See him as he plots foulness in the heart which I gave him as a sanctuary of Christian purity—I made it, I died for it; I own it; and he has used it for his unspeakable wickedness. I am his Father. I have fed him and clothed him and lodged him; and I have saved him a thousand times from eternal shame and torment; and yet he goes right on sinning, as if to say to Me: Father Thy gifts of soul and body, I have indeed received them, but I will neither thank Thee for them, nor in using them will I obey Thee. I received Thy favors and I reject Thy love. Well did God exclaim by His prophet: "Thou hast made Me to serve by thy sins, thou hast wearied Me by thy iniquities" (Isaias xliii, 24).

If it be asked how a feeble man can injure the infinite God by sinning against Him, the answer is plain. God by His commandments has committed to us His honor. The iniquity of the child is the shame of the parent. Furthermore the voice of conscience, which sin contradicts, is the voice of God. By the loving inspirations of grace in our secret thoughts, God's honor is personally and privately confided to our keeping, an honor so high that holy writ names it the Spirit of God: "The charity of God is spread abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit dwelling within us" (Rom. v, 5). Again, we are warned not "to extinguish the Spirit" by mortal sin (1 Thes. v, 19).

See the example of St. Paul in his conversion; for though he had not attacked Christ personally but only

St. Stephen and other disciples, yet from the Lord Himself came the terrible reproach: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?.....I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest" (Acts iv, 5). Whether one sins against God's ten commandments, or against the plain dictates of conscience, or against the least of God's followers, he sins against God, and to God he must render account. The sinner takes his place in the anti-Christian horde that is secretly led by Judas Iscariot and openly marshalled by Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate, rushing on to the crucifixion of the Son of God. St. Paul teaches that the sin of covetousness is "the serving of idols" (Eph. v, 8). Indeed every mortal sin is an act of sacrifice offered up to some unclean or rebellous rival of the Most High God. Sin is changing fidelity not only from virtue to vice, but from God to Satan. The Wise Men of the East are praised because they offered precious gifts to the new born Savior, gold, frankincense and myrrh. Behold sinners prostrate at the feet of their idol, offering up their gold and their honor and their health, aye and their very souls, to filthy vice and the monstrous demon. Did the martyrs of old ever do more for Jesus Christ than a convivial Christian does for the demon of intemperance?

Behold a man in the state of grace, loving virtue and loving God, chaste and sober and honest, often at communion, a fit companion for saints and angels. He commits mortal sin. Behold him now; the change is like the transformation of an angel into a devil. His every thought is planning wickedness, his actions are filthy. His words are scandalous. His joys are unspeakably degrading. His one sorrow is that he cannot sin enough to gratify his passions. Could there be a greater change?

Is it not equal to a change of religion? In vain does the sinner claim still to be a member of Christ's true Church. For of such a one does the Apostle affirm that he "hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. v, 8).

Religion is nothing else than our union with God as our Lord and Master, a union both of belief and of obedience. Mortal sin destroys that union beginning first by severing the holy union of obedience. It is truly a change of religion, if not by the sinner's immediately giving up belief in God's doctrine, yet by throwing off allegiance to Him. And faith is always in peril in such a soul; for now brutish passions take the place of articles of Catholic faith, and guide him and absorb him more powerfully than the truths of his religious creed. His goings and his comings are in search of forbidden joys; his soul broods upon sin more intensely than it ever did upon Christ and His death and resurrection. As treason destroys the traitor's citizenship in his country, so does mortal sin destroy the sinner's citizenship in the Church, which is the kingdom of God on earth.

You have read that during the French Revolution, the men who had destroyed the old government of the country, undertook also to destroy the Catholic religion. They passed laws abolishing the Church and forbidding the priesthood and the mass. And they went far beyond that; for by legal enactments, they abolished God out of their nation and their life. And finally they set us a new religion, represented by a half naked harlot, whom they carried in sacrilegious procession to the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. They set this woman upon the high altar; they enthroned in majesty there the filthy

creature who symbolized what they called Reason and Freedom—there in the very place which for six hundred years had been sanctified by the august sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself. The whole world was amazed and stunned by such impiety. But is any sinner's impiety less amazing? Is any Cathedral in Christendom so holy as the soul of a Christian, the living image of the Deity, consecrated to an immortal life, one shall endure after all Cathedrals and altars shall have crumbled into dust? And now let me ask, who is the deity enthroned in a sinful soul? What horrible worship of vice is this that has been intruded there, the very sanctuary of God Himself? "To whom have you likened Me," exclaims the Most High by the mouth of His prophet, "to whom have you made Me equal and compared Me and made Me like?" (Isaias xlvi, 5.)

No wonder, therefore, that mortal sin often leads to final impenitence, first corrupting the morals and then rotting the sinner's faith. Yes, faith too often is cast away by the obstinate sinner. Helpless in the grip of bad habits, his soul is darkened by doubts. Meanwhile the evil one uses the power conferred upon him by the sinner, striving every way to hinder his repentance. Satan's whisper it is that fascinates his soul, deadening the reproaches of conscience, insinuating the questionings of unbelief. Even on his deathbed the sinner is in the grasp of his enemy, who hinders repentance by the murmurs of despair, or the false hopes of recovery from an illness doomed to be fatal. But such shall not be our fate. I began my sermon by showing that mortal sin is thus named because it is deadly, death dealing. O I end by declaring that the death dealing sin of man has met its

match in the life giving love of God, shown by the death of His Divine Son on the cross. "What sin," exclaims St. Bernard, "is so deadly but that it may be remitted through the death of Christ?" (Sermon lxi on the Canticles.)

When God created man "He breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Gen. ii, 7). So does the last breath of Christ on the cross, His dying sigh of love for the sinner, inspire him with living hope, renew within him the grace of faith, and move his inmost soul with heartfelt sorrow. He has been in a death stupor of sin, but he is now returning—slowing or rapidly —to spiritual life.

Death is the name that Jesus Christ Himself gives to that awful paralysis of the soul, mortal sin—but O in what accents of thanksgiving does He speak of the return of life. For what did the prodigal's father say of his penitent son? "He was dead and is come to life again" (Luke xv, 32).

CHAPTER III

The Lessons of Death.

IT has happened to me once—I think more than once—that a certain one among my hearers at a mission returned home and went to bed in perfect health—and was found dead in the morning. My sermon was the last he ever heard. May God grant me grace, through the intercession of His holy mother, now to teach with such power as to make you feel that it was the last time you would hear God's word; and cause me to feel as if it were the last instruction I should ever give. My subject is death. My text is taken from the book of Genesis iii, 19.

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread, till thou return to the earth from which thou wast taken, for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return."

Mournful words, uttered by a just God against Adam, and against us, God's ungrateful children. It was a sad day when our first parents left that happy garden, the divine curse ringing in their ears. The first part of it, the penalty of labor, was soon fully appreciated by them, for hunger and cold forced them to toil most painfully upon an earth that seemed to hate them, and to grudge even its scanty harvest of wild fruits.

But what was meant by the curse of death—dust to dust—returning to the earth. The wailing voices of the wind and storm echoed the anathema of God, the leaden sky was a pall upon their spirits, and the withered leaves forecast their own decay. Death!—What did it mean? Could it be possible that so noble a being as man should

die and rot like a beast? These first sinners of our race never, perhaps, actually realized the truth, that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. vi, 23), till they saw the first human corpse—alas, their own beloved child; for their son "Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and slew him" (Gen. vi, 8). Our first parents heard cries of fright and agony in the fields, and running forth they beheld the writhing and speechless form upon the ground, and the murderer, his own brother, standing over him. Presently the first human corpse is in their keeping; and than come the dreadful signs and odors of decay. The first funeral services follow, and the first grave is dug. Then did the awful grief of their souls interpret God's words: Thou shalt return to the earth, thou art doomed to die and rot like a beast.

It seems as if all the ages of our dying race since that day of unspeakable sadness, have left us unconvinced of the full meaning of death, except when, like Adam and Eve, we kneel beside the bed of agony of some beloved friend, follow his corpse to the dark couch of the grave, and return home pierced with the sorrows of our doom. Let us try to recall those sad lessons, catch the sound of that enemy's stealthy footstep, death, and feel the icy breath of the grave upon us. For according to the stern teaching of the Holy Spirit: "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting, for in that we are put in mind of the end of all, and the living thinketh of the end of all" (Eccles. vii, 3).

I.

Death is certain. The certainty of death is the first lesson of life. For each of us a last illness is fixed by

God, our Maker, and our Judge; our coffin is framed, our funeral is arranged, and our grave is dug. From all this we can no more escape than from the call to judgment at the end of the world. As you now mourn for others, some day your friends will mourn for you, many of them for a brief week or two, a few dear ones for all their day—all speaking for you as dead and gone from them, as you now speak of your departed friends. They will be sitting in your empty room with heavy hearts, calling your name with tearful eyes, visiting your grave and adorning it with flowers, fading emblems of their unfading grief. Yes, your turn to die will come; are you prepared for it? St. Thomas More, who suffered martyrdom under Henry VIII, was a brave Christian. But yet he prayed: "Give me Thy grace, good Lord, to make death no stranger to me."

Do you love one another? then I bid you do so with an eternal love, for that alone can meet the stroke of death without despair. Love the deathless part of your friends, their soul, more than what must one day become the food of worms. St. Augustine, recalling his early life of sin, says: "I poured out my soul like water on the sands, by loving a mortal as if he would never die." You look lovingly on a young friend. He is the victim of death; one only future thing is certain about him—he shall die. Death is certain. Not one in all mankind shall escape. God might have spared Mary, who never deserved death, no, not by so much as a venial sin, stainless as she was from the death-taint of Adam's original sin. But God did not spare His Son's blessed mother. He spared nobody. Least of all did He spare His only begotten Son Jesus, whose death is the most awful, the most public,

the most painful, the most pitiable that man ever suffered.

Look at the family circle around the fireside, the happy father in the midst of that bright group, caressing his little child, the others laughing and playing about the room, the proud and happy mother smiling securely upon all this sweet scene. But look again at the now darkened room, the wax candles burning there, the coffin in the center, as if it were some awful guest from the eternal shades. It is the coffin of that father, and there bends over it a broken-hearted wife and mother; she is now a widow, and her children are orphans. In due time she too must take that place. Yea, the doom of sin is upon us all. We must bury one another, as we buried our parents. It seems hard to chide one for loving his near akin; but what is so kindred to everyone whom we love as what shall dwell with them in the grave? Therefore does Job exclaim: "I have said to rottenness, thou art my father, and to worms, my mother and my sister" (Job xvii, 14).

Sometimes you hear of a man dogged constantly by an enemy, ever prowling after him to slay him. To that enemy's hatred, day and night are the same; he sleeplessly watches for his opportunity, literally thirsting for revenge. He follows his victim like his shadow, making life so miserable to him that he often commits suicide. You have each one of you such an enemy; he is your shadowy pursuer every step you take. A human enemy may stab you only to wound. But when this foe strikes, you shall surely die. Your whole life is an incessant fight from one whom you perfectly well know must finally overtake you and destroy you—death.

Your death is thus sure to come; but its day and its hour is hidden from you. To others it shall perhaps seem gradual in its approach; but to yourself it will ever seem all too sudden—that man does not live whose departure from life shall seem otherwise than unexpected, except he be a suicide. Whatsoever event is unwelcome is necessarily felt to be an intrusion. You may forestall sickness, you may elude bankruptcy, you can neither escape your destiny nor make adequate provision for meeting it except by an heroic, and an unceasing resignation to the will of Him, who is the only Master of life and death. "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment" (Heb. ix, 27). It is *appointed!* I remember reading of a capitalist of enormous wealth, who being in feeble health, hired a physician to remain constantly near him, all hours of the day or night. But he died; and in due time the doctor died, or will die. Three or four years, thirty or forty years what is the difference, since death is sure, and eternity alone continues and remains; nor can the hazard of the when and the where of death be ever efficaciously made secure.

How various is the lot of men in life. Some live in castles, and some in hovels; but the lot of men in death is alike for all; all at last dwell in the grave. Now one sleep upon a bed of down and another upon a dunghill; but at last each and all sleep in the dust of the grave. The houses of the living are palaces and cottages, fence corners and jails; and the grave is the common house of all the dead. "I know," exclaims the holy man Job, "that Thou wilt deliver me to death, where a house is appointed for every one that liveth" (Job xxx, 23).

In life men are like players on the stage. Here is a

king with his queen, all gorgeously arrayed; generals and statesmen and slaves and millionaires pass back and forth amid the glory of the play. But when the play is over, stand at the rear door of the theatre, and see the kings and queens and great ones and little ones; each and all, they are poor, tired, drooping creatures, passing into the alley. So do you day by day put on your stage costumes, and speak your pieces—alas, not before a human audience only, but before God and His angels. The end comes; at last the play of life is over and done, and all alike you must pass out the dark door of death into fateful eternity.

Man by his conduct seems to say: I am never going to die. But he is a figure which flits back and forth for a little while; and then he disappears and passes away; a shadow surely deepening into night, a lamp surely burning out its oil. One labors in the field, another plies his tools; or you change money with your neighbors, and presently you are gone. Holy Scripture says of us that we wither like a flower, that our life runs out like water from a broken pitcher. We are not the solid earth but the grass that is green and waving today and tomorrow is withered and gone; not the everlasting firmament of heaven, but the fleecy vapor of a summer sky, or a little rivulet that is borne along helplessly into the vast and eternal ocean.

The grave tells us in trumpet tones what the world is: the world is a fleeting show, is vanity and nothing but vanity (Eccles. i, 2). Consider the grave; it devours everything you love, and gives up nothing till doom's day. The rich man—his coffers were once heaped, every year his gains increased until hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, were counted. And now? "They have slept

their sleep, and all the men of riches have found nothing in their hands" (Ps. lxxv, 3). No gold or silver in their hands, no title deeds or stocks or bonds; all taken away and given to others and become to their first owner but a dream of riches. The poor man—his hapless lot is exchanged for the reward of his Christian resignation; he is in heaven's glory. Or if he has been false to God, he is in the deeper gloom of eternal disappointment. The worlding—no dance that did not see him whirling in its giddy circles, no feast without him, his soul's precious hours spent among the glasses and at the card table. And now? The hand that lifted the glass is rigid in death, the cunning fingers of the gambler are rotting, the smiling face is sad, the foolish, wicked life is forever done.

II.

The time of death is uncertain. We sometimes say of a departed friend: Such and such a day he was overtaken by death. Death therefore had been following him every day he lived—but at a safe distance. A certain day was fixed for it to overtake him—and suddenly he was folded in his enemy's embrace and borne out of life. Death had quickened its pace, overtook him and slew him. O God guard us from an *unprovided* death, whether it come suddenly or not. Blessed is the man who has all his life heeded the admonition of the apostle's vision: "Fear God and give Him glory, for the hour of His judgment is come" (Apoc. xiv, 7).

How this warning never becomes trite to God's wiser servants is shown by Saint Teresa's words written to one of her nuns: "It seems to me, my daughter, that all things here pass away so quickly, that we ought to make how to

die the burden of thought rather than how to live." The saint had just received news of the death of her favorite brother, Rodrigo.

The day will come whose sun shall rise on your life and you will never see his setting. You will use God's sunlight for your good deeds or your foibles as you have used His darkness for your repose; and presently light and darkness are swallowed up in death. O, it is the last day of your life and you know it not! "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that the sun shall go down at midday—and I will turn your feasting into mourning, your songs into lamentations" (Amos. 9, 10).

Our buried relatives and friends—what a sermon they could preach to us! O ye that are dead! where are you now? They answer: We are in the houses we built for ourselves whilst we lived with you. The following is an epitaph in an ancient cemetery:

Sinner pause as you pass by;
As you are now so once was I;
As I am now so you must be,
Prepare for death and follow me.

O pitiless death! No prayers can conquer his relentless purpose for he is the bailiff of the Immortal King. You are here assembled together in holy meditation: O how surely comes the time when you shall all be scattered, each in his silent grave.

Ah, the time that has been given thee by thy Maker and Saviour for getting ready to die happily and join Him in His kingdom, is slipping away from thee. If a thousand prophets warned thee, I fear that thou wouldst

still postpone. At last the dire event arrives when least expected; "like a thief in the night" (Luke xii, 29) as Jesus Christ warns us; death shall literally steal upon us and carry our soul away into eternal captivity.

Sometimes the newspapers report an accident, with this remark: "He barely escaped death." But no, he did not escape death, no one escapes death; but sometimes its stroke is averted; what seemed impending doom was but its forecast, a merciful warning. But whatever any one, be he saint or sinner, can hope, he cannot hope to *escape* death, and he cannot count on being prepared to meet its fatal peril except by always fearfully and lovingly resting in the shadow of God's protection. Some who barely have recovered from a deathlike illness in childhood, will long years after hopelessly regret that they did not die in their early innocence.

You and I have met men who answer to the scriptual description of a typical sinner. "They have proclaimed abroad their sin like Sodom, and they have not hid it" (Isaias iii, 9), glorying in their wickedness, boastful, shameless, sinners, who have been leaders of sin and instructors of sinners, wreckers of families, hardened, scoffing, faith-despising Catholics, the very sense of God's existence dimmed, the difference between evil and good almost effaced in their minds; or backsliders of many half-hearted promises in futile confessions; wicked men who strive to serve two masters, being rather sacramentarians than Catholics, an managing to sooth their conscience by confession, and at the same time to remain servitors of Satan, until at the day appointed—the last warning is sent them—and disregarded; and the fiat of God's justice is launched upon them.

Yet I do not deny—God forbid that I should deny—that as long as life lasts we can hope for, we are commanded to hope, yea and to pray for the repentance of our evil living friends. And there are innumerable cases of the fulfilment of this holy hope. But alas, how often it is disappointed. Yet we continue to pray with most resolute determination, for those especially who have taken on the awful habit of delaying repentance, accompanied by occasional reception of the sacraments coupled with a false hearted delusion about their contrition and purpose of amendment, O I bid you whilst besieging heaven with your prayers, not to cease most earnestly to warn, to counsel, to plead, and to exhort such of these as God has placed near to your heart.

III.

It is not for me, this sudden death, says some one, for I am in perfect health. But if you were monarch of all the means of health, it yet remains true: "A king is to-day, and tomorrow he shall die" (Ecclus. x, 12).

To many hearty persons, health is a calamity, for it makes them careless of religion; whereas the feebler are not without anxiety, which compels spiritual no less than bodily precautions against a sudden and fatal collapse. And is it not the strong, full-blooded man who is snatched away by apoplexy, or heart trouble? One who has escaped from many accidents becomes foolhardy, and he is at last stricken down when everything seems safe. Even old men, doting upon the past, are little prepared for present dangers; death easily and quickly quenches the feeble sparks of their wasted vitality. Young men, dreaming of the future, are caught all unready by some sudden

accident. No class is exempt. But if any class be less exempt, and more surely fated than another, it is the over-confident—and these are the overwhelming majority of the human race. To one and all does the Lord address His warning, as peremptory as it is oft repeated: "Watch ye, therefore, for you know not when the Lord of the house cometh, at evening, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning; lest coming on a sudden he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all" (Mark xiii, 35, 37).

Many years ago I heard of a man of means named Montgomery. He left his wife and family to visit a specialist in a neighboring city, for he felt nervous about some irregular action of his heart. After returning from the doctor's office to his hotel, he wrote a letter to his wife to be posted in the morning. "Good news"—so he wrote—"the physician tells me there is nothing seriously the matter with my heart. I shall have another examination tomorrow, and after spending a few days attending to some business matters, I will return home. I am very much relieved to find I have many years of life yet before me." That letter never was sent; he was found dead in his bed the next morning.

CHAPTER IV

The Particular Judgment

"Remember my judgment; for thine also shall be so: yesterday for me, today for thee."—(Ecclus. xxxviii, 23).

THE Holy Ghost in these words voices the message a departed friend would send back to us, after the first day of his own eternity had passed. Remember, he would say, that thou, my beloved friend, hast taken my place in the line of souls slowly moving out of life into the judgment hall of God. "Yesterday for me, today for thee."

Do we not seem to expect some such message? As we take our farewell glances of a dying man, and as we behold his face whiten and shrivel into the glare of death, we almost can hear a voice, distant and faint, but yet masterful, saying: "Remember my judgment"—it will soon be your own. The corpse seems to be listening, to be absorbed in some stern procedure, to hear awful words; it seems ready to speak. The dead face itself is like a stained and spotted mirror reflecting the first events of the soul's eternity. O eternity, deep secret of God, mysterious domain of the dead; thy voices and thy events and thy dwellers should enthrall our inmost souls, thy spell should be the signal of holiness and the imperious monitor of perseverance in God's friendship.

Deep as may be the mystery of the first steps in the future life, we yet know that eternity begins with the

trial of the soul in the court of Jesus Christ. St. Paul teaches that: "It is appointed for men once to die, and after this the judgment" (Heb. ix, 27). So that there are two judgments before us, one the great general judgment, so terribly pictured by our Saviour, when all mankind in their assembled nations, parishes and families shall render account both to God and to one another mutually, of all their good and evil deeds. But there is also plain revelation of another judgment, not public but secret, when each particular soul shall be confronted by its divine Master—a particular and separate judgment awaits every human being at the moment of death. "Behold I come quickly," says our Redeemer, "and My recompense is with Me, to render to every man according to his works" (Apoc. xxii, 12).

As we have painfully studied the expression of a dead friend's face, so shall our weeping friends strive to read our fate in the ashy paleness of our own faces. And meanwhile Jesus Christ is turning over the leaves of our life-long record in His book of justice. He warns each of us beforehand: "I will reprove thee, and set thy transgressions before thy face" (Ps. xlix, 21). May He grant us the grace of holy fear against that day; may He guide us to a due and diligent preparation of our hearts for His inspection the moment of our death.

I.

Reason itself points to a separate accounting to God. We are not created all together, nor do we die all together. One by one we come into life and pass out of life; one by one we enter eternity through God's judgment hall. Every one of us is separately redeemed by

Jesus Christ, who is as much our particular as our universal Saviour. Hence a particular as well as a universal accounting. Each has his own special qualities of mind and heart, as well as his personal, private graces; must there not be a private reckoning for each of us? Our Master's undivided love has been granted to every one of us; His tender care has been shown in special providences without number. As thus His love is given to each one in particular, so shall the infinite scrutiny of His justice be directed upon each one in particular, a separate sentence pronounced, separate and particular lot assigned to each of us hereafter.

In remembering our sins, we instinctively blame others for them, yet knowing well that the deeper guilt is always our own; and we also know that whatever share of our wickedness belongs to others, they must answer for; whatever share we have in theirs, we shall answer for—one against the other—a just reckoning shall be made. But think of the awful joint interest in every transgression between the sinner and his God; this is finally to be settled whilst his soul is standing alone in his Creator's presence at the beginning of eternity. This is the real and the only terror of death, whose meaning is God's peremptory message to a man: "I must now see thee alone." What a terrible ordeal, when the infinite God shall deal with us one by one.

Life as it passes seems to vanish out of existence; but in truth its days and nights become pages of the divine memory, in which all transitory things are made eternal. Our joys are bright for a little while—and they are done; our sorrows soon become but tearful memories, which in turn die out of sight and are gone. So life seems. But

no, no. Nothing that ever was in your existence ever ceases to be, except sins that have been forgiven; during your life time. All shall yet be weighed in the balance of infinite right, this done before your very eyes; and all eternity shall be fixed by the result. Forgotten is a word unknown to God, except about our sins forgotten in the pardon and peace of reconciliation.

A great ocean of forgetfulness is in every man's life, upon which the deeds we do pass off and drift away into deeper and deeper obsecurity, and at last are lost to view and quite forgotten. But we shall one day follow after them and meet them on the other shore, be confronted with them, forced to own them, and eternally to stand or fall as they are found to be good or evil. Then shall the Christian soul hear a voice saying: Show Me thy veil of baptismal innocence—it is Jesus who speaks—what blots and stains are these I see upon it? Show me the record of thy tears of penance, thy promises of amendment sincerely made and faithfully kept, thy "fruits worthy of penance" (Luke iii, 8). Tell Me of thy prayers and thy alms, thy confessions and thy penances. Thou mightest have been a saint, for I gave thee saints in thy family, and among thy friends, to be thy models. I gave thee holy priests to guide thee; I continually lighted up thy soul with devout thoughts; I many times warned thee of My coming; I sought to draw thee to My heart, and make thee a beloved friend: didst thou repulse Me?

What an ordeal, to be contrasted with our own faithful friends, nay, with the divine model Himself. If this hour He should show me His wounds, and He should tell me of His love for me, could I stand up and answer Him: Jesus crucified, I have not been unfaithful to Thee?

Saints have quailed at this thought; and what are my feelings? "If the just man shall hardly be saved," exclaims the prince of the apostles, "where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter iv, 18.) You may feel aggrieved at the hard things that may happen to be said to you, but can any threat of hell equal the calm protest of our Redeemer: "I died for love of thee, and I now ask thee, what hast thou done for love of Me?" In ancient times the Lord sent Nathan, the prophet, to accuse King David of his sins: "Why hast thou despised the word of God to do evil in My sight?" And David was withered up with fear, besought forgiveness, and was saved (2 Kings xii, 9). Not by a prophet, but by God Himself shall I be accused at the moment of my death and with no hope of pardon, not the faintest possibility of salvation, unless I can prove my repentance.

We are much affected by our Saviour's prophecy of the end of the world, and the final condemnation of His enemies. But yet at the general judgment, one might hope (however vainly) to be lost to sight amid the unnumbered throng of the damned. Where Judas Iscariot and Pontius Pilate and king Herod shall stand forth and be judged, together with monsters innumerable and of every kind of iniquity, ordinary sinners might dream that they could skulk away unnoticed. But not so at the particular judgment; for within a moment of his death each sinner will have a doomsday all to himself, standing alone and helpless before his divine Judge, heaven or hell to be allotted once and forever as the outcome of his trial.

During life it is our dearest privilege to know that God is not dealing strictly with us. If we allege our weakness, He shows a forgiving temper. If we allege no ex-

cuse at all, yet if we offer heartfelt sorrow, He shows Himself a loving Father, and forgives us. But once my soul steps beyond death, no excuse shall avail me, no heartfelt sorrow shall be possible, except it has been possessed before death, and brought over to the judgment—a judgment most strict, urgent, peremptory and final. In this life delay is not only possible, but it is constantly offered, that one may try again and over again to lead a better life, for of this present time it is said: "With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him there is plentiful redemption" (Ps. cxxix, 7). But the final decision of our fate is not according to mercy, but justice. If on the day of death I am not already forgiven, I shall never be forgiven. O my God, "Thou hast commanded Thy commandments to be kept most diligently; O that my ways may be directed to keep Thy justifications; then shall I not be confounded, when I shall look into all Thy commandments" (Ps. cxviii, 4-6).

II.

Where shall this judgment be held? Where else but in the death chamber itself. Wherever God's bailiff, death, shall find me; exactly there will God Himself judge me. Who shall be the witnesses? Ah, let me ask you a question: Did you ever cause anybody to commit mortal sin? He or she will be summoned as witness against you. The whispered allurements will be shouted loud and fierce, and cast back into one's face.

You have marked the silence of living persons in the presence of the dead. Hush! Walk on tip-toe; darken the windows; speak in whispers. But yet why all this,

for the corpse cannot be disturbed; it is deaf and dumb and blind; if you fired fifty cannons in that room, the roar of them would not disturb the ever silent dead. True; but we feel instinctively that others are invisibly present there; the corpse is surrounded by Jesus Christ's court. Behold Him there. The day will come when you shall gaze upon Him face to face—behold Him settling the fate of an immortal soul. Hear the accusations of the demon, who clamors for his victim; hear the answers of the panic striken culprit; hear the sentence, the shriek of despair; or the ecstatic voice of joy, if the soul is saved.

St. John Climacus tells of a monk of the desert named Stephen, whom he knew well, and who had spent many years serving God in solitude and prayer. When death came to him he sank into a lethargy, and it was thought that he had passed away. But presently he called out in a frightened voice: "Demon, thou liest; that crime I never committed," and after a while he again cried out: "Yes; I confess it; I did that filthy deed, but I sincerely repented, God forgave me, and I have done penance in this desert for that and all my sins during nearly my whole life time." Stephen was revealing his trial, which had begun a little before his death.

Picture the trial of an impenitent sinner. There stands the Judge, stern and majestic. There is the culprit soul, withered up with an agony that shall never know an end—overwhelmed with terror. Isaias, the prophet, tells us the Lord's words to the guilty wretch: "Let us plead together: tell me if thou hast anything to justify thyself?" (Isaias xliii, 26.) O now he must render account of his sins. In an instant all life from his childhood's years flashes into his memory; all the evil he ever did, or pur-

posed doing, or counselled others to do, marches through his soul. It is as if an awful procession of ferocious beasts paraded there, each dressed in that sinner's clothes, nay, each of them a ghostly effigy of his very self. And these sinful memories are marshalled into God's court by one who has been the culprit's chosen friend, now revealed as his deadliest enemy, the demon. O why shall I during life make a friend of one who is to be my bitterest foe after death and forever. O for one hour of that life to live over again. But that life is done, finally and forever done.

Many a one who has never acknowledged man or God as a master, has nevertheless always been a slave of Satan. He has resented the authority of God's church, because it would deprive him of the liberty to do evil, and he has proclaimed his independence of her sacraments and her priesthood and her devout members, some of them his nearest kindred, his greatest benefactors. His independence was meanwhile a delusion; it was really utter subjection to the Evil One. He knew it full well, but he hoped to live under the demon's guidance and after all die a friend of God. The enemy now claims his own. I am his master, cries the monstrous shape Satan, greedily looking upon him, eagerly waiting for the end. I am his master by every title. Did he not know me, that I am the lord of sinners great and little? I claim thee, thou slave of my every whisper. Nay, thou wast my helper. Thou didst envy me my office and thou didst play the part of the tempter of many a soul. Now, art thou not my captive and my slave? Answer if thou canst. Neither earth nor heaven can now help that soul, which stands stripped of friends, haunted by the memories of the basest

ingratitude, the Evil One standing by proud and triumphant, waiting for his prey.

Shall there be no other accusers there? The very corpse will be called into evidence. Dare the sinner appeal to it and say: Eyes of mine, closed fast in death, open wide and tell what gladdened you in life; innocent sights or wicked ones? Lips of mine, blue and pinched and dead, tell thy tale to this court. Tongue of mine, thou art an icicle in that mouth; begin to repeat the talk of former days; for by thy words shall I be justified, and by thy words shall I be condemned (Matt. xii, 37). Hands of mine, open now, and let the divine judge read in you my evil deeds. Feet of mine, tell your wanderings from the straight way. Heart of mine, reveal now thy dearest joys—what were they? Upon my soul at baptism God fixed His divine mark of ownership, the indelible cross of His love. And now at the end shall be one of those of whom the apostle says that they have crucified the Son of God in their hearts by their sins? (Heb. vi, 6.) Shall demons blaspheme God's mark upon thee forever?

At last the trial is ended; the sentence is now to be pronounced. As the Judge begins to speak it, His angel silences the clamors of the demon. When the voice of Jesus is spoken in love, it is the richest melody of heaven. The bride in the canticles says: "Let Thy voice sound in my ears, for Thy voice is sweet" (Cant. ii, 14). How many times has this culprit soul heard it in the reproaches of conscience, and turned a deaf ear to its warnings? Now its tones search that spirit with fire to its inmost depths. Jesus Christ proclaims the culprit's doom.

And now the Judge, so powerful and majestic and

stern, is gone. The angel guardian is vanished with His Lord.

Let us look again at the corpse in its coffin, now arrayed for its burial. Behold the still, waxen face, the closed eyes, the gently smiling lips. The hand of man has given the body that look of peace; the justice of God has condemned the soul to eternal punishment. My body shall be laid out for burial some day, and my soul—what shall be its fate?

CHAPTER V

The General Judgment

"For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then will He render to every-man according to his works."—(Matt. xvi, 27).

THE judgment of man is often unjust. Public tribunals often err, and even upright judges are not seldom misled in condemning or acquitting culprits. At the bar of public opinion itself, wrong is too often called right, or right condemned as wrong. Nay, in that most just of earthly tribunals, the confessional, deception may be practised, justice may miscarry. But God is a just judge, and His is the final court of appeal. He is determined that at last, perfect and universal justice shall be done. The subject of our meditation is God's General Judgment. I beg you to attend with me the proceedings of this divine court, for you and I shall stand there arraigned. O how solemn the interest which it deserves. Holy Mother of God thy powerful intercession will no longer avail us on that awful day; intercede for us now, and obtain for us a salutary fear of the divine justice, and may the Holy Spirit bestow a heartfelt contrition for our sins.

I.

You have been warned to prepare for death, and you were told of what happens immediately afterwards:

"After this the judgment" (Heb. ix, 27)—the trial and sentence of each particular human being. The day of each one's death is surely coming; just as surely comes the day when, either by decay of old age, or by sickness, or by accident, or in the general burning which will finally wrap the whole world in flames, the last of the human race shall be numbered among the dead. And as after the death of each man his particular judgment will be held, and the sentence then announced shall be irrevocable for weal or woe, in like manner after the death of all men, there shall be a universal arraignment and an equally irrevocable sentence shall be pronounced upon the entire race.

Our Saviour has prophesied the terrible events which precede it. He tells us that at the end of time "the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be moved" (Matt. xxiv, 29). Fire shall then be poured down upon the face of the entire earth and purify it (Apoc. xx, 8). As men burn the beds and the clothing of small pox patients, so will God burn and purify this earth from the loathsome infection of sin, contracted during we know not how many ages. Thus shall our earth be made fit to be God's judgment hall by the cleansing of fire. The cities will burn like kindling wood tossed into heaps. The nations shall perish like a burning forest. You have seen a man arranging his papers, how he crumbles up a handful of useless ones and throws them into the fire; so shall God cast the kingdoms of the earth into the conflagration. "These are the beginnings of sorrow" (Matt. xxiv, 8), says Our Lord. And what calamities should we regard them if they hap-

pened in our own times, these beginnings of the divine anger, these expressions of God's infinite hatred of sin. The cities and the dwellings of the world shall be burnt, but it is for man that the fire is sent. The last form of human death is that by fire. The men and races alive when God calls us to judgment shall perish in the flames.

Consider the universal death which shall follow. Think of the silence of a lifeless world. All is now over, the career of our planet is ended. All its cities, towns and dwellings are totally destroyed, the life of man on earth is passed away, except the dread scenes of the judgment now impending. All the places of our labor and our pleasure, of our sin and our virtue, are vanished out of existence. Around the whole globe of the earth not a creature is left alive, not a blade of grass nor a flower or green leaf remains. The earth to which men once clung with such passionate love is now a universal desert of ashes. Over this scene of once busy life rests the dark gloom of a world wide sepulchre.

Then appears the angel of the resurrection from the dead. He is the divine herald of justice, and his voice is the "trumpet of God" (Thess. iv, 15). It resounds through the ruins of the world. "The trumpet shall sound," says St. Paul, "and the dead shall rise again" (1 Cor. xv, 52). In an instant the whole race of mankind is alive again, souls from heaven and purgatory, and miserable wretches from the vaults of hell all returning to the earth. And there all instantaneously united each one to his own proper body. Arise ye dead and come to judgment! Which of us would have the courage to respond: Lord, here I am, behold I am ready for Thy judgment. St. Catherine of Genoa once heard a person

repeat those words: "Arise ye dead and come to judgment," and immediately she cried aloud in the excess of her love: "Lord, would that I could come to Thy judgment now!" Could you say that?

II.

Judgment day begins with the commingling of the good and the bad in their reanimated bodies. At the call of God earth and sea having given up their dead, and the new and eternal union of men's souls and bodies having been established, the just and the unjust shall confront one another. The souls of the lost, thrust upwards from hell, will communicate to their bodies the horrows of their dark abode. Eyes that gloated upon evil sights shall glare upon the shining glory of the just, and the guilty heart, that in this life beat with every wickedness, shall then tremble at the spectacle of its own foulness and that of its dreadful companions, contrasted with the beauty of the elect. O wonderful spectacle! the horrors of sin shall be revealed in the foulness of the bodily members which were its instruments so many years before. What a contrast with the friends of God. These shall arise from their graves in glorified bodies, transfigured with eternal beauty. God's joy is in their eyes, heaven's music is ringing in their ears. How bitter a reproach to the reprobate shall be the sight of the saved.

What terrible meetings and mutual recognitions shall take place on the field of the resurrection from the dead. Partners in sin in this life shall be partners in woe in the next. They were one in vice here, they shall be one in punishment there, tormenting each other amid mutual curses and reproaches. Tempter and tempted shall be

brought together, the seducer and the seduced. Have you been to blame for anyone's sin? Consider meeting him on doom's day.

How long this judgment of men upon one another will continue we know not. But at last it is done, and now approaches the judgment of the Son of God. Preparatory to that His angels appear, and they begin to separate the good from the bad. Our Saviour tells us: "They shall separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matt. xxv, 32). God allows good and bad to live together during this life. Angelic souls sit at the same table with incarnate devils. Saints and reprobates work together and recreate together and are buried in the same graveyard. Our Lord explains this in His parable of the wheat and the cockle growing in the same field. He tells us that during men's lives, His angels beg Him to let them gather up and destroy the evil ones who are defiling the company of the faithful. "No," He answers, "suffer both to grow until the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers: Gather up first the cockle and bind it into bundles to burn, but the wheat gather ye into My barn" (Matt. xiii, 28-30). At last the time of the harvest has come. It is the everlasting separation of the enemies of God from His friends. Saints to the right! Sinners to the left! Do ye hear that command? It is obeyed instantaneously. See now the two vast assemblages. Let sinner imagine casting his eyes upon the companions of his eternity—the proud and the arrogant and the rebellous; the greedy misers and the sneaking thieves; the fierce haters and the murderers, the filthy votaries of lust; the drunkards and the treaters and the

drunkard makers; the supine, the cowardly and the false-hearted; the treacherous and the hypocritical. To which assemblage shall I belong? Shall I hear the command: Away with him to the company of the reprobate, away with him to the left hand of the judge? Is my place to be with the damned?—with that raging, blaspheming mass of reprobates?

But silence! Hush those frantic cries! Now every eye is drawn irresistibly towards the heavens. The clouds part asunder; it is Jesus Christ coming down "with great power and majesty" (Luke xxi, 27). O how different this second coming from His first. Then he was a gentle, patient babe, and now how great a King. Then He walked with trembling footsteps to Calvary, and now His triumphant march is from the heavens of heavens, coming forth "conquering and to conquer" (Apoc. vi, 2). O how the saints shall rejoice at that spectacle. And let me ask myself: rejoice or shall I wither up with horror? Is it my own voice that I hear crying "to the mountains, fall upon us, and to the hills, cover us" (Luke xxiii, 30) from the face of the Judge? Preceding Him, Scripture says, His standard shall be borne—His blessed cross, which is erected beside His throne. Yes—at last the cross of patience is become the symbol of justice and of judgment.

Do you expect me to describe the scene which follows? No, but listen to St. John, to whom it was shown in vision: "And I saw a great white throne, and one sitting upon it. . . .And I saw the dead great and small, standing in the presence of the throne. . .and the dead were judged, everyone according to their works" (Apoc. xi, 13). Evil deeds are now sometimes made joking matters,

and men shamelessly laugh at them, boastfully tell of them. My God! How shall they lament them standing before that throne!

III.

Now comes the sentence. Turning a benignant face toward His right hand, the Son of God, His heart swelling with joy, awards eternal paradise to His friends: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. xxv, 34). Other words he says to them, overflowing with eternal affection. And then turning to those upon His left hand, He looks upon His enemies and His very looks condemn them. How great their terror as they behold Him and await their doom, their fate written in His stern glances. Ah, before now you may have quailed at the looks and at the words of an angry man. How will you feel when you stand before your angry God?

Imagine yourself listening to the sentence: "Depart ye accursed into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. xv, 41). Depart, lost souls; I condemn you and I banish you forever. I was a loving and patient Father to you, and you were to Me rebellious and treacherous children. Depart! I close the gates of heaven against you forever. I excommunicate you from My friendship and I anathematize you eternally. Depart! I pronounce against you the sentence of everlasting malediction. During your life I often threatened you with it, but I warned you in vain; now that sentence is irrevocably pronounced against you. Your heart already rages and boils with hate, and so it

shall continue ages without end; your understanding is dark and troubled with the memory of your innumerable sins, and its shadows shall never be lifted. Your fate is of your own choosing. And your memory vindicates My justice. "Depart, ye accursed into everlasting fire."

You know that there is a class of sinners who act as if they will be finally saved no matter how wickedly they live, trusting to their Catholic faith and an occasional reception of the sacraments; and they are sometimes men of worldly respectability and even of education. Cardinal Newman surmises that even at the day of judgment they will—some of them at least—still be too proud and presumptuous to realize that they are lost forever. In his sermon on *Neglect of Divine Calls and Warnings,* he pictures such a man struggling to escape from the iron grip of Satan, and crying out: "I am a Catholic; I am not an unregenerate Protestant; I have received the grace of the Redeemer; I have attended the sacraments for years; I have been a Catholic from a child; I am a son of the martyrs; I died in communion with the Church; nothing, nothing which I have ever been, which I have ever seen, bears any resemblance to thee, O Satan, and to the flame and stench which exhale from thee, O enemy of man. Impossible! I a lost soul? I separated from hope and peace forever? It is not I of whom the judge so spoke. There is a mistake somewhere. Christ, Saviour, hold Thy hand—one minute for explanation." These are his cries as he struggles with the fiend, as he is dragged away to the doom he had so many times been warned against; a proud soul that tempted God, that delayed repentance out of presumption of God's mercy, and that was finally caught in the net of his own sins (Job xviii, 8).

Thus ends the day of judgment. O wretched soul! the moment has come for you to take a last farewell of all hopes of Paradise. It once was thine, now it is lost forever. Farewell forever to God. He was once thy Father; thou shalt hate him and blaspheme Him for all eternity. Farewell to Thee, O Son of God, I shall never see Thee more; would that I could forget Thee. Farewell, Thou Spirit of God, I hate Thy goodness and I will deny and defy Thy justice forever. Farewell Mother of God; the thought of thy meekness and thy affection are to be a perpetual torment to me. Farewell, all ye pious relatives and friends, whose good example I despised, whose virtues I ridiculed; I will envy and curse your happiness for all eternity.

But see; whilst these horrible voices fill the air, Jesus Christ and His saints and angels have vanished into the heavens. Thick darkness comes down like a pall on the field of the judgment. The earth shudders, peals of thunder roll, and presently the crust of the earth is riven asunder and flames burst forth; demons and damned sink down into their eternal prison.

O God be praised that we are not yet in eternity; that we each and all have time to prepare for God's judgment. O Jesus, I hear of the tedious delay of human courts, but Thy court is punctual to the moment. O my Saviour, I have but to cry out to Thee, even to whisper, and Thou immediately sittest down to judge me—not now with rigorous justice but with tenderest mercy. I bid Thee judge me now. Open court upon my case. Here I am, a wretched criminal. I plead guilty—yes I am a sinner. Yet I crave pardon. O I am sorry, deeply, painfully, sincerely sorry that I ever offended Thee. More; in-

credible as it seems in one so base, I feel within me a desire to love Thee, my soul is stirred with the beginnings of a service of love. And now sentence me, O dearest Jesus, and say to me: "Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee" (Mark ii, 5).

CHAPTER VI

Eternal Punishment

I SHALL make no excuses for introducing my words on Eternal Punishment with our Saviour's sentence launched upon the reprobate at the last Judgment; for it tells of our theme in terms of adequate severity; but I will couple it with His welcome of God's faithful friends to eternal happiness. The words are found in St. Matthew's Gospel xxv, 34-41: "Then shall the King say to them that shall be on His right hand: Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. . .Then shall He say to them also that shall be on His left hand: Depart from Me you cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels." This is but one instance in which Jesus Christ teaches our future condition by contrasting heaven and hell; in fact He very seldom mentions the one state without the other.

But are not these terrible words: "Depart into everlasting fire?" Yes: but how sweet and gracious are the other words: "Come ye blessed of My Father, and possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

No one is ever lost except wholly by his own fault; no one has ever been saved except because he has, under God's mercy, merited to be saved. And that is, in every meaning of the term, a summary of this awful Christian doctrine; the difference between *Come* and *Depart*. That

is the outcome of obedience to the Creator and Redeemer and hateful disobedience. Mortal Sin it is which fixes that great, impassable gulf between the rich glutton and the starving beggar, discribed by Our Lord in His parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke xvi).

The arrogance of the skeptic rejects this doctrine because he is not humble enough to believe what he cannot comprehend—he will not take Christ's word for the truth of it, or of any other doctrine. The sensual Christian is tempted to reject this article of his faith because a bad life tends to unsettle his mind about the reality of eternal penalties.

But some really good people who nowise question it, yet dread the very thought of it, for they are pained at the thought of such human suffering. This brings to my mind an illustration. Years ago I was shown through the State's Prison at Auburn, N. Y., and I expressed to the warden my feeling of pity for the prisoners. He answered me: "Yes, sir, it is a pitiful sight, these hundreds of men held in confinement, watched day and night like wild beasts, and forced to labor here miserably and shamefully. "But," he added, "trust me who know them too well; you are looking upon the scum of the earth, the class that is the scourage of our people, a gathering of the cruelest, most heartless, most treacherous miscreants of the whole state. And very many of them are here after several opportunities to reform, serving sentence after sentence—all and every one hardened and incorrigible criminals." I bid you not to waste your sympathy; for they are wholly unworthy of it. Jesus Christ, the very incarnation of pity and of love, would never condemn any one to hell, except a heartless, ungrateful

wretch, whom He could not induce to give up his sinful ways and be saved.

On the contrary, to how many is the belief in this doctrine the last plank after shipwreck. Look at that drunken husband. He has beaten his wife every Saturday night for twenty years. How shall he be saved if ever? Do you imagine it shall be by an appeal to noble motives, the beauty of virtue, the dignity of the Chrisian wife and mother—the mother of his own children—the holiness of the ever present God, the crucifixion of Christ? All in vain. He smiles at you as you speak of such things. The last lingering nobility of his character is gone. But under the ashes of his extinct nobility there yet lives a spark of religion—it is his fear of eternal suffering; he dreads pain and he yet continues to believe, or half believe, in God's justice. He can be saved by the threat of eternal punishment, a low grade motive but one that is religious because it takes God into account, and is divinely placed as a stepping stone for higher and really saving motives. From the beginning of the world servile fear of hell has introduced such sentiments into a sinful soul as respond to the first requirements of efficacious repentance and later on even to final perseverance.

Hell is therefore the doom of the wicked and none others, the obstinate and irreformable wicked. Christians are not permitted to judge whether this or that particular one is wicked. The Catholic doctrine of human sinfulness is that men are wicked who disobey God's commandments in matters of grave moment, fully known to be such, and done in entire freedom of will; serious matters involving breach of friendship with the Deity, done de-

liberately and under no constraint or duress. Such an act if done in ignorance, or done under actual compulsion, however grave it may be in itself, does not violate friendship with God. The final decision is that which begins eternity—at death. But the Catholic Church forbids us to hold anybody eternally lost, no matter under what unfavorable circumstances such a one dies; nay, the Church insists that we must hope for the best, or, at least, suspend judgment, leaving the decision wholly to a merciful God; and this is true even when, on account of very scandalous accompaniments of the sinner's offenses, she may have excommunicated him. Only one man is plainly and eternally damned because he is revealed to be so, namely, Judas Iscariot (Acts i, 25). *Just who Are the wicked?* is known only to God as far as personal damnation is concerned; those who are still living, may shed off and be rid of their wickedness by repentance at any moment they shall desire to do so; for "God wills not the death of the sinner, but rather that he shall be converted and live" (Ezach. iii, 18). This divine rule is absolutely universal.

It is not necessary for me to offer detailed evidence that eternal punishment of the wicked is a standard Christian doctrine. It was always so. The General Council of Florence but registered the faith of all ages both of the Hebrew and the Christian Church when it proclaimed many centuries ago that: "There is a hell, whose torments are eternal, and into which sinners at their death do immediately descend, to be punished diversely according to their diverse guilt." Our Saviour taught this doctrine through His public life. He approved of its teachings as written in the Old Testament, which affirms it in

very many places. He constantly placed before His hearers the choice between eternal misery and eternal bliss. Prophesying the end of the world and the Last Judgment with much detail (Matt. xxv, 1). He concluded with calling the just to Paradise forever and condemning the wicked to Gehenna forever. Deny eternal punishment and you deny eternal happiness, for you reject the Lord Jesus Christ as your teacher. You would hereby banish Him from the throne of divine truth in every church and family in Christendom; and you would affirm that He who so loved mankind as to come down from heaven and to die for their salvation (John iii, 14, 15) is a monster of cruelty or a deceiver of the entire race. Are you ready to give up the discipleship of the Lord and Master of heaven, because He insists that those who have become wicked enough to despise the God who created and redeemed them, shall suffer the penalty adequate to their guilt?

Of course this dogma involves a mystery. But do you not remember the apostle Thomas and his temptation to doubt the Lord's resurrection?—and that after he saw his risen Saviour he yielded up his stubborn heart to believe in Him—do you not remember that "Jesus saith to Him: Because thou hast seen Me, Thomas, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen and have believed" (John xx, 29). The testimony of all Christendom, beginning with Jesus Himself and His apostles, and maintained through all ages—is it not enough to certify the truth of eternal punishment, no matter how mysterious it may be? Meantime fear of Hell, born of Christian faith—not the delirium of fanatical supersition —it is not degrading. It is humbling. It crushes the

pride out of us. It purifies us of self love. It is only when God has impressed me deeply with His majesty that I am in a fit state to appreciate the boon of having Him for my Father, the boon of eternal joy in heaven. St. Bernard says that nothing burns the sinner in hell so hot as his own perverse will:—his wilful, deliberate sinfulness, persevered in until death. And in very truth his own conscience condemns the lost soul before God does. These three things stand fast I know. First that to every man God proffers the boon of salvation; second, that to every man He at the same time offers the grace to accept it; third, that His mercy is over all His works.

What they cannot understand, some men say that they will not believe. Now we dare not say that we *cannot* understand eternal punishment, but must rather say that we cannot understand it *now,* or cannot understand some parts of the doctrine. But there is no reason to suppose that herafter we shall not fully understand even by a natural effort what puzzles us in this confessedly imperfect state. The man who would comprehend all about Divine things in this life, is one who either underestimates the dignity of the infinite, or overestimates his own natural powers. The nearer we approach the sun and the straighter we look at it, the more it blinds us. The more clearly we see by the sun's light, the less directly do we gaze upon its own unclouded face. The closer we think of God the more His infinite attributes overwhelm us with mystery.

The absolute diversity of the next life from this, the difference between a life without time or space and our present one of slow moving hours and tiresome footsteps;

and a state of being when time has ceased and duration is no longer measured by the movement of created things; when eternity has begun, with its epochs and cadences marked by the breathings of the life of Infinite Being—from such a state of existence any information to our poor present state can only be received by a most imperfect comprehension. The participation in divine things here below awes reasonable men in silent wonder, deepens their own life, and fills it with a devout longing for a perfect knowledge of what can now only amaze and humble, but need not confuse them.

As to the number of the lost proportion to that of the saved, a very practical thought is that already uttered. Christians are prohibited from sitting in judgment upon their followmen. No mandate is oftener uttered by Him who is the only "Searcher of Hearts" (Rom. viii, 27) than this: "Judge not that you may not be judged" (Matt. vii, 1, 2). Who can know all the necessary conditions of mortal guilt in any particular case—such as fullness of advertence and entire freedom. Consider, too, the more or less mitigating and palliating influence of heredity, environment, rooted habit, haste or ignorance. We must not ignore the possibility of hidden repentance and pardon even at the very end of life. When a man sins Christ departs from him reluctantly and when he repents Christ returns to him quickly and joyfully. It was a saying of St. Francis de Sales that "the mercy of God is His right hand, and His justice is His left hand" (Treaties on the love of God, Bk. ix, Ch. viii). Satan may be thought to accuse God and say: Why hast Thou condemned me for one sin whilst Thou pardonest men who have committed thousands?

To return, finally to our theme, be remembered, that taken as a whole, the race of man has ever believed in the eternal separation of the good and evil hereafter. It is written upon the ancient monuments of Egypt, in the ancient books of the Hindoos, it is a thousand times repeated in the mythologies of Greece and Rome. It has a name in every tongue, it has been a dogma in every widely prevalent religion, and has always been the most potent means of deterring or reforming sinners from an evil life. It was taught by Plato, by Virgil; witnessed by Celsus by Plutarch. Not only the cultivated heathens of Greece and Rome, but the barbarous heathens of almost every tribe known to civilized man have held the doctrine of eternal punishment of the wicked. The only ones who denied the immortality of the soul. The ancient Jewish people most firmly believed in it, and so do those modern Jews who still cling to their scriptures. "Which of you," says Isaias, "can dwell with devouring fires, which of you can abide in everlasting burnings?" (ix, 5.) "Their worm," says the prophet, "shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched" (lxviii, 24). The only Jews, in Our Lord's time, who denied eternal punishment were the hateful sect of the Sadducees, who denied immortality altogether. Numerous texts from the Old Testament might be advanced directly or indirectly the Jewish belief.

And how could all Christendom have been deceived? Is Christ a deceiver? Is God's Word forfeit in Him? Certainly, yes, if there be no Hell, for Christ has taught it, and all Christians with most insignificant exceptions, have believed it. If there be no Hell, Christianity is a most monstrous superstition. If any man believes Christ

to have been even so much as a messenger from God to reform the world, he must believe in Hell for one result of Christ's mission has been the thorough establishment of that belief among all who bear His name.

And here is a very practical consideration. If there be eternal punishment, I will not say of the frightful nature believed by many Christians, but of the mildest type know to Christian faith; if this doctrine be, I will not say absolutely certain, even a strong probability, yea if there be the slightest chance of its truth; if in a word there is any possibility at all of my being punished in any degree whatsoever for ages without end—why, what is there in life to compare with the interest I must take in such a subject! How business, health, ambition, fade into foolish dreams until I have finally settled this question. I remember many years ago a conversation with the late Father Hecker, Founder of our Paulist Community, concerning eternal punishment, the discussion of this question at that time raging in the secular press. I noticed that he took rather a languid interest in it; and I told him so. He answered me: "I take a live enough interest in that subject; but my absorbing interest being, naturally enough, eminently personal, is in heaven; for I am not going to hell, and I am going to heaven, please God; I am a Catholic and a convert, and every wakeful hour something occurs to hearten me in my determination to die a happy death." I never forgot that lesson.

May I not suggest the same thought to my readers? That will secure them from all practical danger of eternal punishment; for God's rewards hereafter are infinitely more glorious than His penalties are painful: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into

the heart of man to conceive, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. ii, 9).

The essential punishment of the lost is therefore their wilful failure to attain to the vision of God. Let us consider this for a moment.

What is man? He is an imperfect being struggling after perfection. No man ever knows what he really is till he awakens to the conscious possession of faculties which earth is too weak, and this life too short to satisfy. The human understanding is tormented with mighty problems about this fleeting life, and about the mysterious future life; problems never solved and never to be solved, while the human mind is in its present inchoate condition. The human reason is haunted by an awful *why*. Why am I in this world, why can I do evil, why do I suffer? There is an irrepressible longing of the human reason for perfect light on these and other such questions. No reasonable being can be happy without complete satisfaction of his reason.

And as there is a void in the human understanding, so there is a void in the human will. Neither riches, nor pleasures, nor ambition, nor human love can ever fill up the heart of man. Man's heart craves a perfect thing to love, this life can never satisfy that craving. Everything loved of this world is imperfect, and if there were a perfect object of love, some day the grave would rob us of it. No joy is perfect without a certain future. Man, himself, is the noblest being on earth, yet the soul of man naturally aspires to be united to something better and nobler than itself. All the joys and beauties of this world might flow into the human soul together and remain there forever, and yet leave it an unfathomable void. Man is

a creature of hopes, of hopes delayed from day to day, until at the end his yearnings cry out to the darkness beyond the grave. The infinite can alone satisfy the intellect or the heart of man.

Perfect spiritual life, destiny secured, aspirations of the soul satisfied, what does all this mean? It means union with God. It means that man is so noble a being that he can never be really happy till he is united to the fountain of all happiness, the infinite being of God.

There is an infinite personal Being, who in the abundance of an immeasurable love and power gave us the life which we live, made our souls after the model of his own infinite intellect and will, and planted in us that insatiable craving for union with himself, which can only be gained by a knowledge and love of his infinite attributes equal to our capacity for love and knowledge in a state of existence far above our natural state—that state we call Heaven, Paradise, the Beatific Vision of God. It is the longing for this vision of God in Paradise, that has consciously or unconsciously stirred the human race most deeply in all its history. The longing for God is man's natural religion and the groundwork of all religion.

The parable of Dives and Lazarus is Our Lord's own definition of the Christian faith concerning this awful dogma of eternal punishment: "And it came to pass that Lazarus died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. And the rich man also died; and he was buried in hell. And lifting up his eyes when he was in torments, he saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom; and he cried and said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool my tongue; for I am tor-

mented in this flame. And Abraham said to him: Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is fixed a great chaos; so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot; nor from thence come hither" (Luke xvi, 19-31).

CHAPTER VII

Light In Darkness: The Disinterested Love of God

The master rule for obtaining consolation is for the soul to learn to do without consolation.—Wiseman's Preface to the Conferences of St. Francis de Sales.

THIS motto stands true as a general statement, especially because the sovereign purity of a soul's love of God is shown by its persevering in its usual exercises of religion though berefit of the sweetness of His graces, and even chilled by the frowns of one's associates. When desolation enters a devout soul, it is repelled as if it were a demon; as a matter of fact bereavement of God's sweetness invites, nay, it compels, the nobler sort of motives and exhibits the best loyalty. When it is borne manfully and the soul will not soothe its awful pain by any expedients human or divine, it is something better than even an ecstasy of devotion. Nor does this hinder one from a loving complaint. Our Redeemer's mortal anguish was wholly submissive but it was not dumb; He cried out: "My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Mark xv, 34); and the taunting words: "Come down from the cross!" only strengthened His purpose to stay there and die there; to die forsaken by God and insulted by men! How different is this from our conduct during devotional aridity and despondency.

Many go astray by a gluttonous enjoyment of the sweetness of devotion, yielding unreservedly to it, cleav-

ing to it, dreaming that it hinges them upon and into the very substance of God. And when the appetite is overstated and the sweetness gone, the soul becomes unrestful and distressed. One is no longer willing and prompt either in work or prayer. After perhaps a whole year of feasting comes the sudden drop into loathing; and all divine things, even the most common, are inflictions; there is even danger of our being swept away into grievous sin. Sensible devotion is notoriously mistaken for the very essence of holy love; whereas it is (taken in itself) but a feverish emotion, or an emotional fever, an enthusiasm of fervor to help us breast the difficulties of the first steps of some forward movement of repentance or of winning perfection. Whilst enjoying the tenderness of such feelings, one should not fail to forecast the agonies sure to come later on. When our Saviour shone with the splenders of the deity at His Transfiguration, and the heavens resounded with His Father's voice of loving praise of Him, He chose for the topic of His discourse with Moses and Elias the shame and torture of His death: "He spoke with them of the decease which He was to undergo at Jerusalem" (Luke ix, 31).

"Remember poverty," says the Holy Ghost, "in the time of abundance, and the necessities of poverty in the day of riches" (Ecclus. xviii, 25). And again: "In the good day enjoy good things, and beware beforehand of the evil day; for God made both the one and the other" (Eccles. vii, 15).

Raging hunger is a pathological condition, and sating one's self with dainties mars digestion. Basking in the third heaven of religious joy is too often followed by vigils outside the infernal gates. Sensible devotion which

passes beyond ordinary feelings of fervor, is usually followed by fits of acute sadness. Cardinal Newman says: "All the passionate emotion, or fine sensibility, which ever man displayed, will never by itself make us change our ways, and do our duty. Impassioned thoughts, high aspirations, sublime imaginings, have no strength in them. They can no more make a man obey consistently than they can move mountains. What alone serves (for example, for repentance) is not these but a settled conviction of one's guilt, and a deliberate resolution to leave one's sins and serve God."

A troubled mind is to be made the alembic of virture purged of interested motives. Right service of God is a state of refinement of motives, and means that the loving God for His own sake and not for any other reason whatsoever. It has been truly said that "a wise soul loves tribualtion more than consolation, because it sees nothing to love in troublemindedness save the cross, the only infallible mark of God's will." "If I desire pure water only," says St. Francis de Sales, "what care I if it be served in a golden vessel or in a glass, as in either case I take only the water: yea, I would rather have it in a glass, because this has no other color than water itself, which thus I also see better. What matter whether God's will be presented to us in tribualtion or in consolation, since I seek nothing in either of them but God's will, which is so much the better seen when there is no other beauty present save that of this one of His most holy, eternal, good pleasure" (*The Love of God,* Book ix, chap. 5).

Sensible devotion has been compared to straw, whose whole use is for the wheat; and when the grain has been threshed out it is good for nothing better than to make

a cheap bed, or for kindling a very smoky fire. Another illustration is this: It is better to eat bread without sugar than sugar without bread.

Let us allow that there is one sort of sensible devotion which may be not only tolerated but welcomed and cherished, nay, prayed for; a joyful feeling that we are worthless, not deserving of comfort but guilty of stripes. Though Our Lady was wholly sanctified from her first moment, yet she sang before earth and heaven—not that God had rewarded her immaculate sanctity, but that He had had regard to the lowliness, of His handmaid, and that therefore her soul magnified the Lord and her spirit rejoiced in God her Saviour (Luke i, 46-48). At the Presentation in the temple the Divine Infant left His mother's arms to rest in those of Simeon. But why would He not remain rather on Mary's bosom, a far happier and holier place? No; neither happiness nor holiness is graded according to place but according to God's free choice. One would think that the venerable Simeon, once he had got the holy Child would never give Him up again; but no; the ancient Hebrew, after so many years of waiting for Him, received Him and gave Him back with equal sweetness and joy.

And John Tauler thus moralizes: "You must know, dear children, that when the Spirit of God comes into our souls, He always brings great joy, bright light, sweet consolation, for He is called and He is the Comforter. And, now, what too often happens? When the silly man feels this happiness, he appropriates it to himself in a state of self-satisfaction. He diverts his mind away from God to the enjoyment of God's gifts. Quite the contrary is the way of the wise Christian. He ever reverts

to the origin of his joy, and restores all God's gifts back to God with clear-minded self-renunciation (Third Sermon for Pentecost).

Desolation of spirit may be infiltrated into us by a meddlesome demon; or it may be due to an inborn tendency to low spirits; or it may be the hard grip of God's awful friendship, his imperious spouseship; or it may be the mental strain caused by unsleeping watchfulness against importunate temptation—a strain on faith even, or the sickening sense of a growing distrust of God's love. O the long agony! O the ever-widening distance in such a heart between faith and love! But it is even now that one must realize that he is drinking the bitter tonic of salvation: "Jesus therefore, when He had taken the vinegar, said: It is consummated. And bowing His head, gave up the ghost" (John xix, 30).

Faith in every truth, keeping watch in the supreme summit of the soul never ceases to prophesy the coming of a day of repose; but the tumult of the enemy's outcries makes a hell of the inferior reason, drowning the voice of faith, and no sound is heard save this sad word: I shall never have joy again! Racing back and forth in this horrible alternative: If I trust for salvation I blaspheme God's justice; if I mistrust my salvation I fly in the face of God's mercy.

And now there is but one resource, but it is sure: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Luke xxiii, 46). Jesus said these words when He was at the worst; His heart quite broken; His eyes shedding their bitterest tears; His blood dripping its last drops; His heart fluttering in the chilly breath of the grave. His call to His Father was love's last and sovereign protesta-

tion. It must be ours. His words, His spirit of absolute resignation to His Father, accepting fully and unreservedly an incomparable anguish, this refuge is always at our command. When all other solace is impossible, we can always commend our spirit into the hands of this Son of the eternal Father, this Saviour of our soul, and bowing the head as token of our submission, make over to His good pleasure the decision of our everlasting destiny.

Shall I weary you by once more placing before your eyes our great patron St. Francis de Sales? I trust not; for if he be my favorite so is he everybody's favorite. And inasmuch as he is the serenest and most happy and most encouraging of counsellors, it is a special joy to know that in his spiritual formation by the Holy Spirit he was tried to the uttermost in God's school of gloom; the history of his awful despondency is thus given by Le Camus, doubtless the record of more than one intimate conversation: "Whilst he was at college in Paris, the evil spirit was permitted by God to insinuate into his mind the terrible idea that he was destined to be of the number of the damned. This delusion took such possession of his soul that he lost his appetite, was unable to sleep, and day by day grew more and more wasted and enfeebled. His tutor and director (the Abbé Deage) alarmed at the loss of his health, and how he had grown pale, listless and joyless, often questioned him as to the cause of his dejection and misery; but the demon who had been permitted to fill his mind with this delusion, being what is called a dumb devil, the poor youth could give no explanation.

"For one whole month he suffered this mental torture,

this agony of soul. He had lost all the sweetness of divine love, but not, happily, his fidelity to God. He looked back with bitter tears to the happy time when he had been as it were inebriated with that sweetness, nor did any ray of hope now illumine the darkness of his night of despair.

"At last, led by a divine inspiration, he entered a church to pray, yet once again that this visitation might come to an end.

"Let human slothfulness and stupidity be ashamed that God is more ready to give than we are to receive," says St. Augustine. "It is a more blessed thing to give rather than to receive" (Acts xx, 35). Who loves blessedness as much as God does? There are beings whose joy in giving is measured by the greatness of the gift—and of these God is the foremost. To give paradise is His greatest joy. He will not easily be hindered of that joy. God numbers the hairs of our head (Luke xii, 7). But His graces pass all power of numbering. He counts our sins, indeed, and He reckons our guilt, but His Son's merits are infinite.

"On his knees before a statue of the Blessed Virgin he implored the assistance of the mother of mercy with tears and sighs, and the most fervent devotion. He ended by reciting the *Memorare* (Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary), imploring Mary to obtain from her Son at least this favor: that inasmuch as he was destined to be abandoned by God and be lost, he might continue until death in the love of Jesus. Immediately he began to feel the power of Mary's intercession. He seemed to hear the voice of God within him saying: 'I am thy salvation, O man of little faith; wherefore dost thou doubt? Thou

art mine and I will save thee; have confidence; I am He who has overcome the world.'

"And then the devil departed from him, the delusion vanished forever. Francis felt that he could never sufficiently thank God for this deliverance" (Spirit of St. Francis de Sales, English version, pages 304, 305).

The sum total of all counsel on spiritual despondency, is that the Divine virtue of hope shall be emphasized and cherished with undeviating fidelity. Listen to the apostle: "For we are saved by hope. But hope that is seen is not hope. For what a man seeth, why doth he hope for? But if we hope for that which we see not, we wait for it with patience" (Rom. viii, 24, 25). Hence this saving virtue grows in merit in proportion to the darkness in which it gropes; and also in proportion to its unswerving reliance on the divine promises; until at last its perfection becomes paradoxical. Abraham merited to be the father of all the faithful for his devoted cleaving to this seemingly sèlf-contradictory virtue: St. Paul says of him that "against hope he believed in hope, that he might be the father of many nations" (Rom. iv, 18). The final trial of a perfect man is his willingness to grope about for joy in the dark depths of despondency. Once when Father Hecker was undergoing unutterable mental distress about God's purposes with him, I heard him say these words: "After all, religion is essentially joy," and his face was lighted up with a bright though flitting gleam of joy.

How blessed are such thoughts when grace wings them home to our hearts. How noble becomes, not so much the confidence as the boldness of such a soul, as he encounters the ever-recurring doubt of his eternal welfare. This boldness was illustrated to Master John

Tauler by the teaching of that strange Beggar whom by God's manifest providence he one day met at the door of his church:

The Beggar said: "Thou didst bid me good day, my Master, and I answered that I have never had a bad one. In fact, when I am hungry I praise God; when I am cold, or it hails, or snows, or rains, if the air is clear or foggy, I praise God. If I am favored by men or despised, I praise Him equally. And all this is why I have never known a bad day. Thou didst wish me prosperity, and I answered that I have never known adversity, for I have learned to live with God, and I am certain that all that He does can be naught but good. Therefore, all happens to me that is pleasing, or the contrary—sweet or bitter—I receive from God as being very good for me. Thus I have never been in adversity. Thou hast wished me happiness, and I answered that I have never been unhappy, for I have resolved to fix my affections only on the divine will. Hence it comes that I desire only what God desires." .*The Master said:* "But what wouldst thou say if God would will to cast thee into hell?" *The Beggar said:* "God cast me into hell? If He did it, I would embrace Him with my two arms. With the arm of humility I would embrace His sacred humanity, and with the arm of love I would embrace His divinity, and I would thus force Him to descend with me into hell. For hell with Him would be more happy than heaven without Him." The Master concluded from this that loving resignation, united to profound humility, is the shortest road to God. (This famous interview of Tauler with the mysterious Beggar is part of the introductory matter preluding Tauler's sermons.)

CHAPTER VIII

Heaven

A prayer for a happy death: "May God support me all the day long, till the shades lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and my work is done! Then in His mercy may He give me a safe lodging and a holy rest, and peace at the last."

MEN are born into this world "children of wrath" (Eph. ii, 3). At our first step the evil one says: I claim him. Truly is this life called a place—not so much of exile, for that may be voluntary—as of banishment, far from our homeland, in constant danger of losing it finally and eternally; meantime exposed to a thousand miseries, ending in the saddest of all—death; every evil thing aggravated by the uncertainty of a better life hereafter.

Hence the grace most precious of the Church's whole year. It is called the virtue of hope, but also that of faith: "If Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain, and your faith also is vain" (1 Cor. xv, 18). When our Saviour rose on the first Easter morning He gave the eternal answer to the prophet's tearful petition: "Say to my soul: I am thy salvation" (Ps. xxxiii, 3). And this is His answer: "Death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for

the former things are passed away" (Apoc. xxi, 4). Thus does faith enrobe our soul in the vesture of hope and joy. The one and only solace of a bereaved father and mother over their dead child is this: He is saved. He is sure of being loved by Christ forever. Could there be a diviner answer? It is the adequate solace of human bereavement. Holy Church voices our response in her Easter hymn:

"Hail purest victim heaven could find,
The powers of hell to overthrow;
Who didst the chains of death destroy,
Who dost the prize of life bestow.

"Hail victor Christ! hail risen King!
To Thee alone belongs the crown;
Who hast the heavenly gates unbarred,
And dragged the prince of darkness down."

It is this feeling that inspires—not so much content with death as a longing for it. I know of a saintly priest, for many years wholly devoted to Christ, and the salvation of souls, who, midway of this saintly career, was suddenly overtaken by a mysterious illness. The doctor, who was a close friend, was baffled in his search for the causes of this calamity, and said: "Father, can you not tell me plainly what is the matter with you? I am not satisfied with your answers." The patient answered: "Doctor, this is what ails me: I want to die." Nor would he be induced to answer otherwise, and he refused to join in the prayers for his recovery. So he died with the gleams of eternal joy shining in his face. Of a fervent

novice very near death, this is told: the priest said to him: "Do you wish for anything?" He answered: "Read something for me on the love of Jesus Christ for sinners." O how truly placed was that parting petition in the Heart of Jesus. And how unwise are they who remind a dying Christian of his virtues and merits, yea, even if these have been heroic. He does not thank them for that, but only for thoughts of the love of Him, Who "to this end died and rose again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living" (Rom. xiv, 9). When it was announced to St. Alphonsus Liguori that death was approaching, he said solemnly: "Now from this moment we must think and speak only of Paradise."

If we may hazard a surmise of the first thoughts of a good Christian after death we may feel that he is transported with a glorious sense of relief: So now all is over; this is what I have so long waited for, nerved myself against, most painfully prepared for—death is come and gone and I am saved: the sweet face of Mary, the Divine welcome of my Saviour Jesus Christ. Ah, is it possible! What an easy trial after all, what a cheap price to pay for eternal glory. Some months of sharp pain of body and dullness of mind—or even years—bereavements and misfortunes, even scorn and ill usage. How I was distressed, how much I made of it all, yet in reality how little it amounted to. How little have I suffered, how slight has been my merit, to win so marvelous a boon as a happy death.

Therefore, has a saint exclaimed: "Blessed forever be Thou, my God, who in a moment undoest a soul, and then createst it anew." Truly does this happen at death. "Behold, I make all things new" (Apoc. xxi, 5).

It was said of St. Bonaventure that he was strongly affected with the thought of the glorious company of millions of angels and saints, all most holy, loving and glorious; he adorned each of them with his distinguishing trophies and graces; in a state in which every one will possess in others every gift which he has; and all those gifts which he himself has, doubled so many times over as he has partners in bliss. For loving his every companion as himself he will rejoice for the felicity of each no less than for his own.

Heaven is a condition where every inspiration of grace shall be mandatory, and every co-operation of our will shall be instinctive—every grace shall be a gift of glory, and every impulse of freedom shall be oblation of worship—where the supremacy of God's grace shall be absolute and the reciprocity of the soul's will shall be perfect.

Realizing the postponement, nay, the risk of forfeiting heaven is the essential element of our exile. We are not citizens of this but of another country; our citizenship here is an experimental one, fitting us—especially creating longing for—"a better, that is to say, a heavenly country" (Heb. xi, 16). Our sweetest occupation here is to dwell in spirit on that which is our future and our lasting city:—sweetest occupation and also our most strenuous one. We must anticipate it hopefully yet solemnly, obediently yet joyfully resigned to His will, who surely shall strip us of our body in His own chosen day, at His own chosen spot: a mighty force attending His summons; whose word, however, ends the dreary chill of waiting; going forward to meet Him with hearts saddened indeed by contrition but cheered by hope. And

when the sharpness of the pain forecasts the end to be at hand, may we exclaim with the Good Thief: "Lord remember me, when Thou comest into Thy kingdom" (Luke xxiii, 42).

St. Camillus of Lellis, founder of the Order of Servants of the Sick, was proficient in impressing God's mercy on the souls of dying sinners. Any sermon which made no mention of God's promise of heaven, he called a gold ring with no precious stone set in it.

I have already named faith as one of the graces plentifully dispensed whilst thinking of the end. This grace lies in our willingness in making ventures for a happy death, not infallibly certain of final perseverance—a certainty we have, but not an unqualified certainty; it is mingled with some painful quaverings, just the feeling that Magdalen and the two apostles had when they came and saw the empty sepulchre. Now, disregarding that quavering and making the venture of faith in spite of it, is the most meritorius offer of our loyalty to the truthfulness of Christ's predictions of His coming to finally meet and save us. Says a high authority: "Yes; so it surely is; and in this consists the excellence and nobleness of *faith;* this is the very reason why *faith* is singled out from other graces, and honored as the especial means of our justification, because its presence implies that we have the heart to make a venture. . . .nobly and generously risking all upon Christ's word, in all respects leaning upon Him, waiting upon Him, trusting in Him to fulfill His promises, trusting in Him to enable us to fulfill our own vows, and so in all respects proceeding without anxiety about the future."

Here is the apostle's state of mind, as he contemplated

his quaverings and yet assimilated his Lord's triumph over death and its gloom; it is trust not wholly without uncertainty, yet rising to a reasonable trustfulness; and generating a strenuous activity towards final success: "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended. But one thing I do: forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii, 13, 14). This same spirit also inspired the Prophet to speak for God, saying to our soul: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps. lxxx, 11). Spiritual contentment is essentially different from satiety, because the fullness of joy is the sweetness of thanksgiving. "A single good work earnestly done," says St. Francis de Sales, "is worth much more than several done with eagerness" (Conferences vii). This is no certificate for pious indolence; mark that the saint is presupposing a deeply earnest spirit; eagerness and not earnestness is what he is finding fault with.

I have named thanksgiving as one of synonyms of Christian joy, for the one grace without the other is inconceivable.

It is related of St. Dominic that his moods were an alternation of two extremes; either he was exceedingly cheerful—even merry, with thoughts of heaven, or he wept out of pity for sinners. For the latter he used to quote King David: "I beheld the transgressors, and I pined away; because they kept not Thy word" (Ps. cxviii, 158). The sorrowful mood was the saint's Holy Week feeling; the joyous mood was that of the triumph of the Resurrection. "Mind the things that are above, not the things that are on earth" (Col. iii, 2); and again:

"If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God." During Paschal time Holy Church constantly repeats these and other such celestial words.

Masters of spiritual doctrine look askance at our discounting imaginary future trials in order to practice hope and fortify courage against a time of temptation—unless they be trials which are inevitable, such as illness, and especially the dreaded ordeal of death. All such future conditions form the material of prayer, but restfully and calmly offered. No part of the public services of religion are so useful for sedating a mind disquieted by foreboding, as is Holy Week and Easter. Every unbidden guest of tremulous dread about the final steps of our pilgrimage is made welcome in our hearts by the Crucified and the Risen Saviour.

Thus our Risen Lord would have us dismiss groundless fears. One inevitable fruit should be a peaceful mind; this should be the extinction, or at any rate the suspension of scruples. It is the wicked who "flee when no man pursueth" (Lev. xxvi, 17). Holy communion gives me the right to say that I am not of that class. I keep the Commandments. I am rooted and grounded in the true faith. My very wastage of spiritual force, that is to say scrupulosity, proves that my dominant thought is the *fear* of sinning, and why may I not with at least equal force claim the joy of loving? Why should I fly from phantasms when the realities of life eternal are about me everywhere? Religion is not terrorism; nor is devotion a spell of gloom. Religion is joy.

A great master has written these words: "In heaven, sin will be utterly destroyed in every elect soul. We shall

have no earthly wishes, no tendencies to disobedience or irreligion, no love of the world or the flesh, to draw us off from supreme devotion to God. We shall have our Saviour's holiness fulfilled in us, and be able to love God without drawback or infirmity forever."

CHAPTER IX

The Passion and Death of Jesus Christ

"Grace be to you, and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for our sins."—(Gal. i, 3, 4).

GRACE and peace came to us from on high through the agony and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. It behooves us, therefore, at a time like this when we are all seeking with longing hearts for pardon of our sins, to meditate on how our Saviour gave Himself up to His enemies, and suffered death, that He might offer Himself crucified to His Father for our redemption.

Jesus was the Only Begotten Son of God, and true God, One in being with the Father. But He so loved us that He would redeem us from our sins by taking upon Himself all their shame, and all their deserving of death and woe, every penalty due to sin, all that is meant by sin, except, of course, the guilt of sin. In order to do this most generously, most efficaciously, He became Man, was born of the Virgin Mary, and every way was as truly Man as He was truly God. Therefore His whole life long, Jesus Christ actually was our fellow-man, our brother. Every moment of His life He felt Himself to be standing before His Father's throne in spirit "making intercession for us" (Rom. viii, 34), as one brother does for another, offering Himself to divine justice in our stead. And this He did. O with what love for us we

shall never know till we are with Him in Paradise. And if this be so, should we not make Him what return we can? The best form of doing so is giving Him our love in exchange for His own, for our love is the only recompense He desires. It is with that end in view that we should meditate on His sufferings and death during our whole lives, but especially during these spiritual exercises. St. Francis de Sales says that "Calvary is the academy of holy love." Come, then to Calvary and learn a lesson of love. Let us take our stand with the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of sorrows and of love, beneath the cross of the Savior of our souls. Let us quickly respond to the call of Jesus through His prophet: "O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow" (Lam. i, 12).

O Jesus crucified, sorrow is my quest, sorrow for my sins. If Thou shalt make me weep with Thee for my sins, Thou shalt bestow on me the highest boon in Thy gift, next only to heaven itself. Thou hast said: "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to Myself" (John xii, 31). Draw my cold heart unto Thine, make me a sharer of Thy own boundless love for Thy Father; give me the sincerest detestation of sin and of all that leads to sin. Mary, Mother of sorrows, take me by the hand, and lead me to Jesus crucified; and hold me fast till my sympathy for thy Son shall be in some little way like unto thy own.

I

Let our preparation for Calvary be with Jesus Himself in His agony in the garden. I have already said that the prevailing sentiment of our Redeemer's life was His

feeling of identity with us sinners, members of His fallen race, He being the "first born among many brethren" (Rom. viii, 29). He was constantly overmastered by the feeling of responsibility that He and He alone must be our "Advocate with the Father" (1 John ii, 1), if forgiveness should ever be granted us. Our advocate; and not only that, but also our substitute in bearing the penalty due to our sins. When, therefore, we enter the Garden of Olives in His company, we can but feel the affection of His heart for us stirring our own with a return of love. He is preparing to be sacrificed for our salvation, and the first step toward His death of body is His deadly grief of soul. It is a pain so deadly that He exclaims to His disciples: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death" (Matt. xxvi, 38). Would that we could feel but a little part of that interior pain which overwhelmed Him. Should we not strive to do so, since it is suffered wholly on our account? If the least drop of the ocean of shame and regret that surged in His bosom could but enter our own, our souls would be instantly saved. And that innocent Son of God would have us share it to the uttermost limit of our capacity. O Jesus, not pleasure but pain, not joy but grief, must be my lot in the beginning of my conversion to Thee. Contrition for my sins is Thy first gift to me if I shall ever become Thy friend. Grant me that favor, I beseech Thee, grant it in great abundance.

Let us salute our Savior as He enters upon His agony in the garden, and mark well the events of the painful ordeal He now undergoes. As He moves deeper into the shadow of the olive trees, we might exclaim with the Apostle: There goeth the Son of the living God

who "loved me and delivered Himself up for me" (Gal. ii, 20). Let us consider carefully how much He suffered, as "He began to fear and to be heavy" (Mark xiv, 33).

To use a feeble comparison, Jesus was like the innocent brother of a man guilty of an atrocious crime; and the guileless brother loved the wicked one so devotedly, that he determined to save him at any cost to himself. Moved by love he disguises himself, and he does it so skilfully that he is able to substitue himself for the real culprit, and to take his place in prison; and he is finally tried and executed in his place. So it is with Our Lord. Infinitely pure as He is, He so loves impure man that He assumes the whole degradation of that foul vice; He does the same for the drunkard; in like manner He takes the place of the blasphemer, the apostate. The whole misery of sin, the entire agony of its punishment, He assumes and suffers, so that He may stand before His Father in your stead and mine, and pointing to you and me and all sinners, demand from infinite justice our pardon.

This terrible feeling of human sinfulness was assumed by our Savior for our sake by agreement with His Father. St. Paul describes it by saying that: "Him Who knew no sin, God hath made sin for us, that we might be made the rightousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. v, 21). Our sins entered into Our Lord's thoughts and feelings as poison would have entered His blood had He drunk a cup of it. His horror over our sinfulness was indescribable. It wrenched even from His courageous soul that exclamation of agony: "O My Father, all things, are possible to Thee; remove this chalice from Me" (Mark xiv, 36). This prayer sprang to His lips from His breaking heart in the first horror of His agony.

Jesus is not shrinking from saving us—no; but He would, if His Father permitted, save us without feeling any longer that His own innocent spirit was smirched with such foulness as ours. But instantly, and then repeatedly, He leaves all to His Father's decision, saying in accents of deepest humility: "Not My will but Thine be done."

Now consider further how it is that Jesus expresses all these His feelings about our sins. I have already quoted some of His words, but they must more than once be pondered, if we would understand His purpose rightly. "My soul is sorrowful, even unto death," He exclaimed. This is Christ's pattern for our act of contrition. He uttered it for us and in our stead, for He is our Advocate and our spokesman, as well as our Redeemer. O Jesus, what a consolation is here—Thou givest me Thy own contrition for my sins! The sins are mine alone and the sorrow is Thine and mine. Thy whole life and death and glory, Thy whole Church and all Thy Sacraments are for one single purpose. It is all to cause me to accept Thy sorrow for my sins, accept it sincerely, and make it my own. O Jesus shall I ever be able to say my soul is sorrowful for my sins even unto death? Grant me that grace, beloved Redeemer of my soul, and then life and death shall be one to me, for heaven shall surely be mine.

Thus was Jesus made to know all of our sins and to be filled with grief for them; to know them in themselves and in their circumstances; to know our countless repetitions of them; our broken promises and our relapses after pardon. All this He knew with a perfect knowledge, and with the tenderest, the divinest interest, not only in all of us together, but in each single one of us.

And in this dreadful condition He now appeals to God for our pardon. St. Francis de Sales voices His plea to the Father in our behalf: "Jesus cried, Ah, My eternal Father, I take to Myself and charge Myself with all My poor brother's sins, to undergo torments and death that he may be freed from them. Let Me die that he may live; let Me be crucified so that he may be glorified" (Love of God, Bk. xii, Ch. xii). Which of us has a heart dull enough to refuse to love the Son of God thus suffering for his sake, thus praying for his salvation? Which of us can accompany Jesus in the agony in the garden, and refuse to repent of his sins? A death sorrow it was indeed, a death agony for our sins, freely chosen by one divinely innocent, but faithful and true to us, His fellowmen, who are so awfully guilty. But the more guilty we are, the more more beloved by Him.

"And," says the Gospel, "there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him" (Luke xxii, 43). That bright messenger from the realms of celestial bliss approached Him, bowed down and adored Him, his King, and his God, and then reverently wiped the sweat from His divine face. You know that the angel found our Savior's sweat mingled with His blood—for His heart had broken, as it were, and had given forth its life drops that they might mingle with His sweat. He could thus offer His Father the witness of His blood to show how deeply sincere was His sympathy for us. But what right has that angel there, whilst we stand idly by? Jesus, Thou are not an angel, nor the Savior of angels; Thou art a man and the Savior of men. Thou art my Savior, not this angel's. Holy angel of God, give me that place, for it is mine by every title, especially that of a penitent

sinner; mine is the right to comfort Jesus. Dearest Jesus, I know that my love is dearer to Thee than that of any angel; accept it as a solace in Thy agony. O I love Thee—I declare before this angel and before Thy Father that I love Thee; I repent of my sins because I love Thee; I will never offend Thee again, because I love Thee. To love Thee shall for the future be the best and only joy of my life, and my greaest honor. Thou sayst to us: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John xiv, 15). And I promise Thee that my only honor and joy from this day till the end of my life, shall be to show my love for Thee by keeping Thy commandments.

II

Our time will not allow us to meditate upon all the great events of Our Lord's passion. I can only ask you to go with me direct to Calvary, and be present at His holy death. At your leisure, I trust, you will study over His betrayal by Judas, that awful act of treachery, done in spite of Our Lord's most earnest endeavors to save His falsehearted Apostle. You will in proper order consider Our Lord's arraignment before the high priests, the lying testimony against Him, His perjured judges. You will in spirit spend that dreadful night with Him, when His toturers " spit in His face, and buffetted Him, and others struck His face" (Matt. xxvi, 67). And you will consider how He spent the hours until the dawn of Good Friday, whilst they treated Him like the vilest malefactor, and also like the most friendless creature in the whole world. Indeed He was wholly friendless; He was abandoned by all. And you will bear in mind that He bore all this most patiently, because in due time, as He well

foreknew, the recital of it would move us in our deepest soul to love Him; and that his ignoring would appease His Father's anger against us and secure us the kingdom of heaven.

Then, my brethren, you will follow Him to Pilate's court, attending, with your hearts full of sympathy, while He is accused and acquitted by the Roman Governor, yet not released; then sent to the licentious Herod to be made a mockery of, to be returned to Pilate, there to have the murderer Barabbas preferred before Him. And you will stand in spirit and see Him scourged to the bone for your sins, mocked by Roman soldiers, and crowned with thorns. And finally you will hear Him condemned to be crucified. There He goes, then, bearing His own gibbet on His shoulders, treading the way of the cross, to be followed in spirit with sweet trustfulness and deepest sympathy by so many millions of penitent sinners in after ages, trod now by Jesus in dire reality, and with such disgrace, such sorrow, such deadly weakness, yet always with the mighty courage of a divine Redeemer; for He knew that His agony was our hope, our only hope. At last He reaches Calvary; and our further privilege is to be present at His last agony and His death.

III

We stand on Mount Calvary; we are witnesses of the nailing of Jesus to the cross. Do you hear the strokes of the hammer? Down falls the hammer; again and again it quickly strikes, and the blunt points of the nails are forced through the center of those gentle hands, so often raised in blessing, so often used in working His

miracles of love and power, ever extended to sinners, inviting them to come and be pardoned; now willingly stretched out to be nailed to the cross. At every stroke the blood of Jesus spurts forth and spatters the cruel hands and the hard faces of His executioners. Ah, how precious is that blood; those nails, too, are they not precious to us? St. Paul tells us so, for he says they fasten our sins to the cross of our salvation, they nail our iniquities on the cross with Him, where the divine blood can be poured upon them and blot them out forever (Col. ii, 14).

Now Jesus is lifted up; and though for a little while He must have been literally transfixed by the pain of that awful posture, hanging by the nails, helplessly fastened to so cruel a gibbet, yet He immediately recovers His thoughtfulness of others. What others? Who are His favorites, receiving now His first, quick, loving attention? Who are the men who won His first thoughts and words on the cross? Are not these entitled to the highest distinctions among Christians? Alas, brethren, these prime favorites of the Crucified are His bitterest enemies, the very men who hounded Him to death; they are the chief priests and the scribes. They are present there to enjoy His death; they gloat upon His shameful, horrible sufferings; they fill the air with their insults. These are the ones that Jesus first considers. For them He offers a prayer to His Father, a petition which pierces the skies, which penetrates the heart of God, which drowns the fierce yells hurled against Him: "Father, forgive them; they know what they do" (Luke xxii, 34). How forgiving a heart is Thine, O Jesus Crucified! And to think that among those enemies of Thine, I have had my place! My sins have insulted Thy majesty, have

blasphemed Thy goodness, have mocked Thy death agonies. May I not therefore claim my share in Thy prayer? O divine Father of Jesus, forgive me all my sins, for Thy crucified Son entreats Thee for my pardon, and my own soul from its deepest depths proclaims my sorrow, and promises amendment with perfect sincerity.

Thus Jesus begins His sermon from the cross. Is it not wholly appropriate to His character, as the "Man Who is the friend of sinners?" (Matt. xi, 19),—as these very enemies of His had accused Him of being? O Jesus Thou art not ashamed of us sinners; indeed we are Thy friends by Thy own choice and preference. Thou art not ashamed to hang on the cross for us, not ashamed to pray for us publicly, not ashamed to pour Thy life's blood over us and cleanse us from our appalling guilt. Henceforward, O Thou true friend of my apostate soul, I will not be ashamed of Thee. I will be Thy friend in storm and sunshine; I will keep Thy commandments faithfully to the end of my life.

Mark the insistence of this Friend of sinners; for His second word is addressed to a hideous sinner crucified alongside of Him. This poor wretch, an obscure, nameless robber, stained with crimes so many and so dreadful that he publicly confesses that he is justly put to death, is nevertheless touched by the sight of our Savior's sufferings, and he humbly says to Him: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." Like an echo comes back to him our Savior's absolution. "Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise" (Luke xxiii, 42, 43). O my sinful soul, dost thou not long to hear those words addressed to thee; to hear the voice of Jesus saying to thee: Thy sins are forgiven

thee; this day or some later day, thou shalt surely be with Me in paradise? Whatever my sins may be, the very soul of Jesus crucified yearns for me, loves me, will pardon me, will give me heaven forever. And on my part, what must I do? Let me detest mortal sin, of all things the most detestable, and the most injurious to my eternal welfare; only let me imitate the pentitent thief and say to Him Who never yet repelled a contrite sinner: Lord, remember me in Thy kingdom, pardon me, give me a place among Thy angels and saints; for with my inmost soul I am bitterly sorry that I have offended Thee.

Thus far Jesus is concerned with sinners, the worst He could find. And only after He thus had gratified His passionate longing to save them, does He turn His attention to saints. The maxim of His life and of His death is this: Sinners before saints. And He sees the greatest of saints standing at the foot of His cross—His Mother. Let us set aside all timidity and creep close to her side, that kindhearted mother, and listen attentively to what Jesus shall say to her. He says: "Woman, behold Thy Son." He thus invites her, does he not? to look upon Him in His pitiful plight: Behold Me, thy Son, nailed to a cross and about to die. Is not this His meaning? Ah, no. His purpose is still and always to benefit us. For having called to Mary: "Woman, behold they Son." He immediately turns His eyes towards a gentle figure standing alongside of her, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," John, the son of Zebedee. Having therefore said to His Mother: "Woman, behold thy son, after that He saith to the disciple: Behold thy Mother" (John xix, 26, 27). John stands for us all; he is a disciple of Christ and therefore our divinely

chosen representative; he is not only son of Zebedee, but son of our poor, fallen father Adam. John, thou art my brother, and my friend; and when Jesus gives thee Mary, His Mother, to be thy mother, He thereby gives her to me. And O Mary, I call thee my mother, because I am brother of thy son John, but most of all because I am brother of thy Son Jesus, Jesus Crucified. O Mary, dost thou love Him? Then thou must love me, thou must take me to thy motherly heart, thou must intercede for me in time of temptation, thou must pray for me now and at the hour of my death. Amen. This solemn adoption of all our human race into the family of Jesus and Mary and Joseph, is one of the most precious favors of Calvary.

And now the event expected for so many ages is about to happen. Jesus is dying. One would think that the last moments of the King of Glory would be the brightest, happiest that heaven could bestow. Alas, no. The gloom of our sins enshrouds Him and will enshroud Him to the very end. So deep was His sadness—and you will not forget that it was all due to His sympathy for sinners —that while death was knocking at the door, His misery wrenched from Him a cry of desolation, a loud complaint to His Father: "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying: My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. xxvii, 4, 6.) It is the voice of our Savior's interior woe which speaks to His Father, so that we sinners shall not suffer eternal woe in hell. "A loud voice" He used, though He was at the very extremity of bodily weakness. Is His voice loud enough to catch your ear, my sinful friend? Can this loud cry of the dying Savior awaken you from the sleep of indifference? Can this death cry of the Son of God drown

the alluring voices of your passions, the enticing words of evil companions? You must say yes or no to these questions, perhaps an eternal yes or no. O Jesus, I can answer Thee. Thou dost ask why Thy Father has forsaken Thee, left Thee the helpless victim of Thy ferocious enemies, left Thy soul dark and desolate with grief? It is because Thy Father loves sinners to that degree that He will permit His Only Begotten Son to suffer the extreme of torment that they may be saved.

Then were heard His words: "I thirst" (John xix, 28). They came from His parched lips and from His poor heart famishing with thirst for our souls. Once He had solemnly declared that His food was to do the will of His Father, (John iv, 32), and that divine will, we know, is that Christ should die for sinners. "A faithful saying," cries the Apostle, that Christ Jesus was sent by His Father "into this world to save sinners" (1 Tim. i, 15). His thirst for our souls is a torment of fire, His zeal to redeem us from hell is a burning desire; this His death-thirst is to win us to love Him. Shall it be wasted upon us? Shall we mock His dying thirst with the vinegar of our indifference?

And now He feels the cold hand of death reaching towards His very heart. His breath comes and goes in gasps; a fearful sinking away of all His bodily powers warns Him that not many minutes more shall be left Him in which to suffer for us. He murmurs feebly: "It is finished" (John xix, 30), and delivers Himself up to the final throes of death. But even yet He is not done with us; His last word has still to be spoken. What shall be His last utterance? Of all virtues, which is the one Jesus shall choose for His death motto? He chooses

hope, my brethren. Once more He summons His dying body's strength to serve His soul's never dying zeal: "And Jesus again crying with a loud voice, said: Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit. And saying this, and bowing His head, He gave up the ghost" (Luke xxiii, 46). As He utters this last cry of mingled love and trust, His face grows ashy pale, His poor blood-streaked form stiffens, His eyes are glazed over, His blue lips part, and His jaw falls. Slowly the gentle face bends downwards, as if sinking in lowly submission to death, the tyrant that sin had set over all His brethren. Then with a deep-drawn sigh, our loving Redeemer breathes out His spirit into His Father's bosom. Jesus now hangs dead upon the cross.

Jesus is dead and we are to attend His funeral. Come, every one of you, it is Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of Sorrows, who invites us. Come, ye innocent souls, faithful friends of Jesus from the beginning of your lives, come, gather to this divine funeral, to wait but a brief three days for His resurrection. Come, ye penitent souls, long since freed from your mortal guilt by sorrowful confession; ye are no less welcome than the guileless ones who have never stained their baptismal robe. And you sinners—come you, too, one and all; indeed you are the most welcome of all. It is your special privilege to wash this blood-smeared corpse with your tears of contrition; yours the privilege to anoint His holy body with the precious spices of your purpose of amendment and your love. Mary herself yields place to you at the burial of her Son, for you are His favorites and hers.

CHAPTER X

The Intercession of Mary

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus, therefore, had seen His mother and the disciple standing whom He loved, He saith to His mother: Woman, behold thy Son. After that, He saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own."—(John xix, 25-27).

OUR beloved mother stands beneath the cross of her Son, our sponsor at our baptism in His blood. She is the advocate of all mankind. She is the queen of all the innocent, being herself miraculously stainless, leader of those countless hosts of men and angels who have never sinned. Therefore did the spirit of God place at her side guileless John the "disciple whom Jesus loved." And she is the queen of all the pentitent, for she is the mother of that Man of sorrows, "Who His own self bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we, being indeed dead to sins, should live to justice, by whose stripes we are healed" (1 Peter ii, 24). Especially for sinners does she take her place on Calvary, to draw us there for our repentance, to hold us there for our perseverance. The sorrow of Mary's heart for our dreadful guilt is the first and largest share of Christ's sorrow that any human being ever received. Sorrow for our sins with all of a

mother's tenderness is the highest privilege of Mary, because atonement for us is the whole motive of her Son's passion. For God did not send His son into the world alone, but gave Him to us "made of a woman, under the law, that He might redeem them that are under the law" (Gal. iv, 4, 5). Hence the prophet Jeremias (Lam. ii, 13) says that her desolation of soul is "great as the sea" —all for us, my brethren, all for us, her sin-stricken but wholly contrite children, as I trust we are.

John was ever innocent and he held his place by that good right. But Mary Magdalene had been guilty, so guilty, that out of her seven devils of lust had been driven by our Savior (Luke viii, 2). Now she is bright with seventy times seven cleansing graces; and she holds her high place on Calvary close to the Immaculate Mother. Proudly, then, let us take our stand there, some few spotless of every mortal sin, the great mass of us once grossly defiled with mortal sin, but now as truly purified as even the Magdalene. Beloved mother of sorrows I proclaim before the face of thy expiring Son, that my dearest birthright is holy sorrow. That alone it is that clears a passage for me up the hill of Calvary, scattering all my foul enemies whether devils or men; that alone places me there beside Thee among all of God's elect.

And now, my brethren, as we are to consider Mary's maternal love for penitent sinners, may she intercede for us, that a depth of sincerity wholly miraculous may be accorded to our contrition, and the boon of final perseverance may crown it at the end of our life. O Mary, blessed refuge of sinners, how many times this night have we not with tearful hearts bespoken thy goodness at the very end of life's battle: Holy Mary, mother of

Jesus crucified, pray for us now and at the hour of our death—Amen.

Let me remember that we Americans have a special claim on the Mother of Jesus, for she is the patroness of our country, under the title of her Immaculate Conception. Consider that privilege. It is an article of Divine and Catholic faith that Mary, by reason of the forseen merits of her Son and Redeemer, was sanctified from the first instant of her conception in her mother's womb. It was God's will that the mother of His Only Begotten Son, destined as she was to be the leader of all His hosts in the vital conflict with error and vice, should bear the banner of victory even at her entrance upon life's battle. She is the great woman of the primeval Scriptures, with whose mighty sway God threatened Satan in the garden: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head" (Gen. iii, 15). And St. John saw her in his vision of the last days, a shining symbol of God's eternal triumph: "And a great sign appeared in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Apoc. xii, 1).

Our patroness has the unique glory of having lived free from vice, and from even the least temptation to vice. From beginning to end of her earthly existence, she was never so much as touched by that slimy hand whose caress is so fatal to mankind. It is not, indeed, by personal ownership of grace that she is stainless, but, as the Redeemer's own mother should be, she is immaculate by the original forecast and the preventive interposition of Him to whom she was to be joined in the closest union of soul and body. She is God's holy one by the excellence

of her maternal office in the divine work of the Incarnation. He would not allow her to see the least corruption of sinfulness (Ps. xv, 10). Mary's spotless spirit needed no sacraments to cleanse it, or rather their source and fullness, the divine Founder of the sacraments Himself, anticipated them in her sanctification.

It is good for Americans to have such a patron. We are Catholics in the open, helped little by any human means. The family tie, a holy safeguard in foreign lands, is weak among us. Racial influences of religion, generally of great help in holding fast to a good life, are in our country soon diluted and dissipated. Our religion must be of an independent kind, full of personal knowledge of the truth of God, and of intelligent love of Christ and His Church. It is each man's religion, his own to love and struggle for and to practice, proudly and nobly, leaning solely upon God and upon the Divine organism of His Church. We need Mary's immaculate patronage for our American citizenship, for it is a sovereign citizenship, the people setting up the nation's rulers and toppling them down. It should be every way stainless, free from such a foul smirch as that of bibery, free from so mean a selfishness as party narrowness. Mary Immaculate is the right intercessor to obtain from heaven the grace of a disinterested love of country in the breasts of Catholic Americans, and a civic conscience instructed by the purest principles of religion.

But if this be her office to our nation taken as a great division of humanity, it is wonderfully more her office to be a patroness of each individual among us. To guileless souls she is the model and standard of all innocence. But to the rest of us, that is to say, the vast majority of

us, this queen of all the realm of tranquil virtue, is a sure refuge in the stormy period of penance and pardon. Mary is not only a paradise of virtue but also a fortress of perseverance. What term of endearment could any advocate of men before God covet equal to that of refuge of sinners. This most spotless of God's servants has no feeling of being excluded from our humanity. Mary, it is true, is God's most loyal lover, she is His very Mother. Yet does she love to mingle with God's enemies, and to draw them by her endearments to seek a return to His friendship—the mother of Jesus is His foremost missionary to sinners. And when they have repented she brightens their minds with the beauty of virtue, at the same time that she instills the bitterest aversion for vice into their innermost thoughts.

She is herself the leader of those ministering spirits, whom God employs in the secret messages of His love. O never let a day pass without realizing that your heavenly mother's breath is upon your cheek, that the stirrings of God's grace come to you through her heart beat. Our angel guardian—can he compare in power or in love with the queen of angels?—with her who is not simply our guardian but our mother. How reverently did the glorious angel Gabriel salute Mary: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women. . . . .the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore the Holy that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke ii, 28-35). To which of the angels, my brethren, has God ever said words like these? And yet they are glad and rejoice at our repentance. How much rather shall Mary do so, since she

is the mother of that Holy One, Whose single purpose was that He should suffer for our salvation from the manger to the cross.

Would you know the power of Mary with her Son Jesus, her power to win Him to teach us and to save us? Consider how she won Him to herself, obtained exclusive possession of Him with St. Joseph, when she brought Him home from the temple. You remember how she found Him there after He had been lost three days, which He had spent with the doctors of the divine law. She claimed Him instantly: "Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing" (Luke ii, 41-50). In answer to these reproachful words Her Son and our Redeemer protested that He must begin to carry out His eternal Father's plan of instructing the world in divine wisdom: "How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"—and then He lovingly set all that aside, cheerfully yielded to His mother's claim, went down to Nazareth with her and St. Joseph, and was subject to her there as a child to a parent. Jesus herein chose Mary as the first and chief recipient of the wisdom of God unto salvation. During all those eighteen years of loving company at their home, Jesus taught Mary her lesson of being the refuge of sinners. Not doctors of the Jewish law but the mother of divine grace, yes, the divine grace of pardon for sin must be made the favorite lesson in the school of the Crucified. A penitent sinner—has he not cause to thank his Savior for saying to him from the cross: Son, behold thy mother?

When those eighteen years of wisdom and of love were passed, Our Lord began His public life. An incident

that occurred early in His career, strikingly shows both Mary's sympathetic heart and her boundless influence with her Son. While Jesus was as yet in the first stage of preparing for His mission as the world's redeemer, and had only chosen a few of His disciples, He assisted with His mother, at a wedding supper in a little town in Galilee. And it happened that Mary's watchful affection for her guests was the occasion of our Savior's first public miracle; for she secretly came to Him and asked Him to use His divine power to miraculously supply the wedding party with more wine, for their store of it had unexpectedly become exhausted. Jesus, however, declared to her that He was not yet ready to begin His wonder working: "My time is not yet come," He protested. But she did not argue with Him—she knew His love for her too well for that. She straightway went to the waiters and announced her Son's coming to them, and He quickly followed her and worked that miracle of changing water into wine, which St. John informs us was the beginning of the marvellous events which "manifested His glory" and which amazed and won the hearts of His followers (John ii, 1-11). The perseverance of a repentant sinner to the end of his life—of all the miracles that our Savior wrought is it not the foremost? If Mary pitied the embarrassment of the wedding party, O will she not fairly melt with compassion over the thought of our eternal damnation? How quick was her eye to see the trouble of her friends at that wedding supper. Shall it not be quicker to see my soul's peril, to behold me trembling on the brink of eternal woe? If Jesus would not and could not reject her petition for a divine manifestation of power in behalf of so little a necessity, shall He refuse her when

she asks for our eternal salvation? The miracle of pardon for an immortal soul, shall it not have preference over a miracle of changing water into wine? O if she but whispered my name to Him, though I were the foulest sinner in the world, He would instantly heed her and grant me repentance and perseverance.

We thank God, therefore, that when He gives us His Son to be our Redeemer, He caused Him to be born of the noblest member of our race, an immaculate mother, a mighty mother. There is no word in all human speech to which men would rather affix the term mighty or great, or magnificent than that of mother. "Blessed be the great mother of God, Mary most holy!" Well did our holy Father the Pope choose that aspiration for one of our prayers after the benediction service. Great before God is her motherly pity for sinners. Great is Mary the immaculate mother of God and our advocate with her Son our Redeemer.

To be a mother, is to hold an office of highest dignity. The very existence of a man is fixed in most sacred relation to his mother; and he is placed by her means in holiest relation to his creator. Our Lord Jesus Christ was thus related to Mary. His eternal Father chose Mary for the human co-operation needed for the divine event of the incarnation of His Son. Such being her relation to His incarnation and birth, now let us ask, what shall be her relation to the death of Jesus? Doubtless His mother's relation to Him is a union of compassion for sinners and of purpose to redeem them as perfect as any created being could have. Consider well all the pain Jesus suffered for our sakes, from His infantile wailings in Mary's arms till His loud cry of woe when He expired

in her presence. Assemble in your thoughts every pang of mental grief and all the pain of bodily torture He endured, in order that we might be saved. Every wrench of His bodily pain and every anguish of His spirit is woven by the Holy Ghost into the majestic robe which clothes Mary as the mother of sorrows. St. Paul said to his brethren: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting in the sufferings of Christ" (Col. i, 24). How much rather could Christ's mother say to us, as she bids us love her Son: I sat down under the shadow of the cross of Him Whom my soul desired, and the bitterness of His death penetrated my inmost spirit (Cant. ii, 3). O pentitent Christian, I bid thee claim Jesus' mother as thy advocate; for every Hail Mary thou dost utter is poured into a heart which was closest to the heart of thy Savior all through His life, even unto that heart's last pulsation on the cross.

St. Paul admonishes us to remember that we are: "bought with a great price" (1 Cor. vi, 20). Who, after Jesus Himself, knows as well as His mother what it cost Him to save sinners. If he conversed familiarly with Moses and Elias at His Transfiguration "on the death that He was to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke ix, 31), how much rather must He have discoursed with His most familiar friend, His life-long associate, the confidant of His every thought, His beloved mother—constantly discoursed and counselled with her about His death for us. With her He considered it now with unflinching courage, again with overpowering sadness all through the years of His abode at Nazareth. Jesus—it is not too much to say it—was always speaking to Mary about God and about you and me, and all sinners, and gladly listening to her

on the same beloved theme of that eternal joy He was to win for us by His death at Jerusalem.

You remember how plainly this association of sorrows between mother and Son was proclaimed a few weeks after the birth of Jesus, when Mary presented her Child in the temple. Simeon spoke by the Holy Ghost when He told Mary: "Behold this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted." His words were prophetic of the parting of the ways leading to heaven and to hell under the cross of Christ. And what he added proclaimed Mary's part: "and thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed" (Luke ii, 34, 35). What thoughts of thine, O sinful soul, shall be revealed by the sword of grief that pierced Mary's soul on Calvary? Shall not thy humble confession of sin answer that question? The deep secrets of thy life shall rise as from some cavern of the ocean of sinfulness, and shall be revealed to God in the sacrament of penance by means of Mary's intercession.

In the ancient Scriptures God is called "the searcher of hearts" (Ps. vii, 10); and of our Redeemer St. Paul says that at the end He "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of hearts" (1 Cor. iv, 5). And He has chosen Mary as His assistant in this high office, and by the piercing sword of her sympathetic suffering on Calvary, she obtains for sinners that wholesome candor of confession, that willingness to manifest the awfulest crimes which is so essential to entering upon an innocent life. God tested Abraham's faith by an act of obedience supreme above all others, the sacrifice of his son by his own hand; being

proved faithful in that, God made him the father of all the faithful, saying to him: "Because thou hast not spared thy only begotten son for My sake, I will bless thee, and I will multiply thy seed as stars of heaven . . . and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. xvi, 18). But, was his son Isaac dearer to Abraham's heart than Jesus was to Mary's? And she offered him up most willingly for our sakes. Look at it another way. Mary was most dear to the divine heart of Jesus, yet He gave her up, yea, He gave even His own mother up to a fate infinitely more painful than death, positively bestowing on her a share in His own death; for a sword of sorrow pierced to her soul's innermost depths for our salvation. When that sword-thrust was foretold her in the temple, she bore its announcement with a heroism all her own. And when the prophecy was at last to be fulfilled, she was eager to receive it, so much did she long to have her share in our redemption. She sought for her death wound on Calvary, found it, embraced and possessed it, thus becoming by her own will as well as by the divine appointment, the mother of all redeeming sorrow.

"Woman, behold thy Son." St. Francis de Sales in commenting on this proclamation of filial union of all sinners with Jesus' mother, quotes from the epistle to the Hebrews a passage to which I have already made reference: "To which of the angels hath (God) said: Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee" (Heb. i, 5). And then the saint asks, which of the angels which even of the very Seraphim, can say to Christ: I am Thy Father, this day have I begotten Thee. But yet Mary can say to Him: I am Thy mother, this day have I begotten Thee. (The Love of God, Mackey's Translation,

p. 320.) O how good is Jesus crucified to share with us so tender a privilege as His sonship with Mary How glorious a dignity is Mary's that God incarnate and crucified should say to her in an ecstasy of love: Woman, thou art My mother, and I am thy Son; and now in this the last solemn hour of My life, I bid thee take every sinner in the world to be Thy son as I am thy Son, and I give him a divine right to call thee his mother as I call thee My mother.

Never was anybody so tenderhearted as Mary, never anybody endowed with a nature as intensely sympathetic as that of the mother of the world's Redeemer. She pities us all as no one else ever could, save only her Son. Of course His pain of heart for our wickedness and His horror at the thought of its penalties, she could not suffer in its fulness for she was not divine. But what she could suffer for us she would and she did, and that was the fulness of all human sympathy. As close as she stood to Him on Calvary, so close would she range her feelings of pity for us towards His, blending them, as far as possible, with His into one great anguish of heart for our sakes. The sorrow of sympathy for our sad lot was as near as possible identical in mother and Son. Mother of sorrows is her dearest title as Man of sorrows is His.

Every motherly instinct of both sorrow and joy that flows out of Mary's heart upon her Son, must pass beyond Him and overflow upon us. All the love of Son and mother for each other is only the highest kind of love for you and me, my brethren, and for all poor sinners, even the most undeserving. It was for the salvation of every single one of us, Jesus said to His mother: "Woman behold Thy Son." Does not this make repent-

ance easier? And may I not add: does it not make relapse into sin impossible to any sincere penitent? How great a boon is this, that when thou approachest Jesus, thou canst say to Him: O my Crucified Savior, behold Thy mother is with me to plead with Thee for Me, that Thou mayest pardon my sins and grant me final perseverance.

And now what should be our practical resolutions about Mary's intercession? To begin with we should duly appreciate our good fortune in having her for our advocate with Jesus, cherishing faith in her motherhood as part and parcel of our faith in her Son. Then we should constantly mingle her name with our prayers to God, and especially to Jesus crucified, God's Son and her Son. Her loving intercession should be one of the foundation stones in our religious life upon which to build the temple of eternal hope. Blessed is the penitent who recites Mary's Rosary daily, or her Litany, and who celebrates her festivals with an especially devout confession and communion. What if you do feel and painfully feel the contrast between yourself and her. Remember that her immaculate conception, the purity of unstained virtue, is granted to the highest of your race for the sake of the lowest, granted to Mary for your sake. And with all her graces, she has none so splendid as the love she bears you, ever since Jesus said to you through St. John, Son, behold thy mother. Many of you perhaps, all of you, wear her scapular, being thereby enrolled in the familiar company of her special lovers; let us try to be worthy of her uniform in fighting our battle against the world, the flesh and the devil.

Many a sinner after years of unspeakable crime, re-

turns to God; and though he may have on countless occasions blasphemed the holy name of Jesus, yet he is now so changed by grace that the bare sound of that name strikes his heart like a wizard's wand, evoking awe, and hope, and joy, often unto tears. O Mary, what a transport of love must be thine, when I speak that name to thee, saying thy own familiar prayer over and over again every day of my life: "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus." What canst thou refuse me, when I utter that divine name, so dear to thee, and breathe it into thy very ear in accents of love? Teach me to speak that name coupled with thy own in times of temptation, and especially at the hour of my death. Obtain for me then and now my share of the immense joy which melts thy own heart.

PART II

CHAPTER I

The Priest's Recollectedness

NOT to feel tired at being alone with God: this is the ambition of a true priest. That such may become our ordinary state of mind, is why holy Church institutes the annual Retreat of her clergy.

The working days of one week are now made days of rest. Silence is absolute; devout reading at every meal; the word of God in conferences and meditations four times every day. Our Savior once said to His apostles: "Come apart into a desert place, and rest awhile" (Mark vi, 31). Thus speaks the bishop to his clergy when he notifies them of the Retreat. Of all appointed times of grace this is the holiest, the most fruitful. Indeed it is rest for soul and body; real repose and comfort; and intensely spiritual.

Once after a layman's Retreat a scoffer asked: "Well, did you see the devil?" The answer was: "No, but I saw myself; and I saw God" (Ps. xiv, 11). A Retreat is the closer interview between the soul and its Bridegroom: "I will lead her into the wilderness, and there I will speak to her heart" (Osee ii, 14).

St. Jerome having offered Mass with the bishop at his ordination felt an overpowering reluctance to offer any other Mass; that was the first and last Mass of the holy

Doctor's life. A very strange inspiration. But think of a whole year of daily Masses! Innumerable confessions; many sick-calls; sermons; instructions to children; seeking for hard sinners—not to mention the incessant parade of their priest before the people—of one who is called to be their mirror of all sanctity. No wonder this one week of silence and solitude and prayer has been set off by the Church by law; enriched with the Pope's best indulgences; and made the foremost event of the spiritual year.

Fuge! Tace! Quiesce!—a maxim of the ancients: Take flight, hold thy peace, be at rest. I once heard a bishop say in a tone of acute regret: "The best we can expect at our diocesan retreat is a particularly good confession." I affirm with no hesitation that in such retreats the silence was not enforced. The bishop's word was a gloomy one; and it was not warranted by our long experience of preaching Retreats, much more extensive than his. The Retreat is the claim of God the Holy Ghost for five days of close communication, separation from one's home and church and people, yea even one's altar; and absorption in divine thoughts: to return again to active life profoundly affected by the graces peculiar to the priesthood—sealed indeed by a particularly good confession.

The priesthood of a diocese should be a society of saints. Is it possible to doubt but that such is actually the will of Jesus Christ? In that society should reign supreme the fervent love of Jesus crucified, an ardent purpose to share His atonement, His meekness towards God and man, and especially His love of sinners. Now if all this is to become a permanent condition, the instinct of

the Holy Spirit must be constantly experienced. For the renewal of this the annual Retreat is His rendezvous with the priest's soul. Divine Wisdom calls men to come and drink the waters of life (John vii, 27). It is the priest's privilege to dispense those waters to the people; but it is now his opportunity to cleanse the spring, which is his own priestly heart. The sweetest spring will gather dry leaves and the dust of the road. In how many cases does a priest only when he is half through life experience a renewal of the graces of vocation—call it his second conversion, infinitely more peremptory and abundantly more fruitful than the first.

By our calling we are absolutely dedicated to speech, and you may ask: how can you bid us be silent? But to what speech is our dedication? The Apostles received not speech but the very gift of tongues. Yet after what preparation? The greatest and holiest Retreat of all history, ten days "persevering with one mind in prayer" (Acts i, 14). And then when they began to speak the world was thrilled with their words; and so continues to be. Holy silence is the storage of thought for wise and holy expression; and silence is the alembic for purifying the motives of speech. Says the Jesuit writer John Crasset: "Never abandon silence except for something better"—namely the fruits of your sacred silence expended in the apostolic ministry. We deal constantly with the most fateful things, and we become like undertakers and grave-diggers—over-familiar with sin, death and judgment; the awful rotations of time and eternity.

A Retreat fits all classes. It is good for a zealous priest, for a lazy one, for a tepid one, for a convivial one, for a hot-headed one, yea, even for a fallen priest. Upon

all and each this holy retirement bestows the grace to appreciate the priesthood as Jesus our High Priest does; or even as the discerning layman does. Would to God that I could look over my own shoulder with an angel's eyes as I recite office; and kneel at my own altar as I offer holy Mass.

When God summoned Moses to the burning bush, He called to him: "Put off the shoes from thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exod. iii, 4). Why holy? Because it was a place afire with God. It was sounding with God's voice. So here is God's fire lighted—divine love's light and guidance to draw your soul, to instruct it, to enthuse it. Loosen your shoes; loosen and cast away every thought; attend to God. He alone burns, He alone enlightens, He alone enthralls.

Several things, all very divine, are to be had here, not possibly elsewhere or otherwise. There shall be a closely connected series of Spiritual conferences and meditations upon the eternal truths. Seldom is a priest preached to even in a single discourse. Now there shall be many discourses, the very marrow of our Master's gospel. Silence; glady accepted and made compulsory and all the deeper because it is made a holy spectacle of recollectedness since all mutually observe it religiously. The recitation of the Divine Office in choir, blending into one sacred chorus of vocal prayer the official prayer of God's Church. Is not all this well calculated to purify our motives; to renew our courage; to enhance our estimates of spiritual values; to elevate our ideals; smoothe irritations; soften aversions; affording that most precious boon asked for in the Church's thanksgiving after Mass: *"Spatium verae penitentiae* for our sins. I am persuaded that a single

Retreat can be made to vibrate its waves of holiness throughout every hour of the succeeding year.

A man hard of hearing with whom I was once conversing said: "Father, I hear your whisper better than your loud tones." A sharp whisper penetrates. Our souls hear the divine Spirit's whisper of love—faint but entrancing. To Elias the voice of God was in the whispering of a "gentle air" (3 Kings xix, 12). We are hard of hearing, perhaps, to God's every day voice. He has a lover's whisper for His priest, uttered in the seclusion of Retreat. Think of this in your recollected moments with the Blessed Sacrament: our Savior feels you more present to Him than you feel Him present to you. Of the Blessed Sacrament we say it is the Real Presence of Christ. But when you are alone with Him the Blessed Sacrament is *your* Real Presence to *Him*. The same may be said of any solitude with God's Spirit: He is much more present with you than you are with Him.

Hence it happens that in a Retreat one catches the savor of mental prayer—what boon can be more precious! Again, a priest must own that he seldom reads a spiritual book except to make a sermon—seldom enjoys conversing on a spiritual subject. Here is the occasion of beginning a different way. An oculist atrophises the eye, suspending clear vision for a time, and thereby secures normal action of the nerves of sight. It is thus with suspension of speech in the interest of normal recollectedness of mind.

A Retreat is the withdrawal of the soul from mundane things to devote it to heavenly things—from God in the outer world to God in the interior life—for the sake of

a closer union with Him; and yet in the interests of our whole duty to God whether within or without. So that after a well made Retreat it shall be an interior man who shall preach God's word, instruct children, hear confessions, visit the sick, and, especially, offer the Sacrifice of the Mass. In a Retreat one does for himself what he does for his people when giving them his best service. Just as the farmer mows his crop of rich clover, cures it and stores it in the barn. But once in every few years he does not mow the clover field; he ploughs it all under to enrich the soil; it costs him one crop, but it renews the land and increases succeeding crops of all sorts. Now in Retreat we plough under a rich fertilizer. What I have done for others I will do now for myself. There is no enrichment of the spirit's fertility I may not gain now in my heart's holy silence with God.

Our teachers tell us that sometimes in the providence of God the graces of a single moment improved or wasted are the salvation or ruin of the soul. This teaching holy Church seems to ratify by appointing in her canon law the annual Retreat for her clergy.

CHAPTER II

The Priest's Holiness and the Sacrifice of the Mass

"Who shall go up to the mountain of the Lord; or who shall stand in His holy place?"—(Ps. iii, 3).

"THOUGH all are included in the exhortation to advance towards the perfect man, 'in the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ' (Ephes. iv, 7), it is addressed before all others to those who exercise the sacerdotal ministry; thus these are called another Christ, not merely by the communication of power but by reason of the imitation of His works, and they should therefore bear stamped upon themselves the image of Christ." From the first Encyclical of Pius X, Sept. 22, 1908, it was addressed to the whole body of the Catholic clergy.

Regarding the grades of vocation to perfection, as these are outlined by ecclesiastical provisions, St. Francis de Sales teaches as follows:

"The motive of divine love pours forth a particular influence of perfection upon the virtuous actions of those who have in a special manner dedicated themselves to God to serve him forever. Such are Bishops and priests, who by a sacramental consecration, and by a spiritual character which cannot be effaced, vow themselves as marked and branded serfs, to the perpetual service of God; such are Religious, who by their vows, either solemn or simple are immolated to God in quality of living and reasonable sacrifices (Rom. xii, 1); such are those who

betake themselves to pious congregations (confraternities), dedicating themselves forever to God's glory; further, such are all those who of set purpose produce deep and strong resolutions of following the will of God, making for this end retreats of some days, that they may stir up their souls by divers spiritual exercises to the entire reformation of their life" (Treatise on the Love of God, Book xii, ch. xiii).

The holiness to which God wills me to aspire is known from the office to which He has called me; it is that of offering sacrifice to Him. I am a priest. There is but one Christian sacrifice, namely that of Calvary, which our Redeemer has perpetuated through me. "As often," said He to the first priests, "as you do this (that is to say changing bread and wine into His body and blood) do it in commemoration of Me" (1 Cor. xi, 24, 25). And the apostle adds that in doing so they shall "show forth the death of the Lord until He come."

Between Calvary and my altar there is no difference in the Victim; and it is the same Eternal Father who receives the offering in both cases; it is the same High priest who officiates, though I am His instrument in voice and act and purpose: His instrument, not merely His proxy or representative. There is indeed a difference in time and place; but what are time and place to the Infinite?—"For a thousand years in Thy sight are as yesterday, which is past. And as a watch in the night, things that are counted as nothing" (Ps. lxxxix, 4, 5). However, one difference there is which is real, namely that of persons—alas, Jesus my priest, how different morally and spiritually is He from me! And as He has annihilated time and space in order to make my sacrifice one with His,

He would also annihilate the moral and spiritual difference between Him and me. I perpetuate, and I at once universalize and localize His sacrifice, and I make it visible and tangible; but my personal qualities are unspeakably different. Christ's will has abolished space and time so that His sacrifice on Calvary and mine on my altar may be made one and the same. That divine will would also eliminate and abolish my personal unworthiness, and make me in a true literal sense what Pope Pius X calls me: *Alter Christus,* another Christ, His Alter Ego. For this marvellous change my Redeemer gives me all the graces necessary did I but assimilate them. O God what a boon! if I could but say that there was in me but a *slight* resemblance to Christ.

Whom did our Savior sanctify first—and best, at His Incarnation? Who but the human being nearest to Him, the one who was the instrument of His Incarnation, His Mother Mary. Now at Mass, which is the Incarnation over again, whom will He sanctify first and best, who but the human being nearest to Him of all mankind, the one who is the immediate instrument of His Eucharistic birth into the world.

That my participation in this renewed Incarnation of the Son of God—a resemblance however faint, of His Mother's—should be effectuated. He echoes my words of consecration and turns and applies them to myself as I speak them: "This is My body," He says of me, "this is My blood," this is My soul, and this is My divinity. As of His Incarnation, so too of His crucifixion: "As often as you shall eat this bread," insists the apostle, "and drink the chalice, you shall show forth the death of the Lord until He come" (Cor. xi, 26). And

how truly may I not aspire to the same apostle's boast: "With Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Gal. ii, 19). O Jesus, what a delusion in a priest to think that he is not called to the highest holiness—what a blasphemy against the Eucharist!

I have already given the grades of holiness as stated by St. Francis de Sales; not similar but identical in meaning is Cardinal Manning's statement of them, interpreting the three sacramental characters: the sacrament of Baptism makes of us sons, calling us to achieve the glory of God; Confirmation makes us soldiers of Jesus Christ, calling us to achieve the greater glory of God; the sacrament of Order makes us priests of Jesus Christ, calling us to achieve the greatest glory of God.

The Christian, baptized and confirmed rises from his bed and prays, and goes to his day's work and battle; the priest rises and prays, and goes forth with Christ to Calvary. O the incongruity, marvellous stupifying incongruity, of a human being enjoying and seeking such a dignity. How can anybody dare to become a priest? Herein is the mystery of vocation, only explained by Our Lord's words: "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (John xiii, 16)—just as the Creator chose the clay of the earth and breathed into it the divine breath of life. The vocation is a divine spell. If by nature and environment I am drawn to the company of clean, gentle women; if I feel the gift of money-making even unto genius for amassing wealth; if I have tasted the charms of privacy and study and other joys of retirement—if any or all of these innocent attractions have won me, yet there comes over me like the fragrance of paradise a spell which forbids the chastest marriage, the most

praiseworthy ardor to amass means for charity, or to be devoted to learning and teaching—all shall be freely, often suddenly refused, set aside, and rejected: *I must be a priest.* So that the time honored title, *Alter Christus* —Another Christ—shall have its inverse meaning: *Christ is my other self.* He has appointed me to personate Him before men and angels. Of a priest à Kempis says: "He should know that he is placed as it were a mediator between God and the sinner. A priest clad in his sacred vestments is Christ's vicegerent to pray to God for himself and for all the people" (*Imitation,* Bk. iv, ch. v).

To no class of men is the word of the apostle so directly addressed as to priests: "This is the will of God: your sanctification" (1 Thes. iv, 3). And also this claim of the same apostle: "Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus; that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies" (2 Cor. iv, 10). Teach me, O Jesus, thus to feel myself one with Thee; to manifest Thy priesthood in my words, looks, manners, and actions, as it is stamped upon my inmost spirit by my calling and ordination.

St. Paul's definition of sanctity taken in general is adequate: "That you may approve the better things" (Phil. i, 10). To give rein to higher aspirations. To be modelled on Christ, and to pattern upon the better priests among us; to frequent the company and the houses of edifying priests—not the convival ones, not the gossiping ones, not the indolent and flippant ones.

No question is more searching than this to a priest: What are your thoughts? Can I answer it this way? I really *have* thoughts. My life is interior, being "hid with Christ in God" (Gal. iii, 3). Do I not teach His little

ones that He is present here, body and blood; gives us here His soul and divinity? It would be strange if my tabernacle should not impress on me the loveliness of deep solitude. How many hours is the Incarnate Deity there silent and alone; and out of His silence and solitude He governs me and mine. O most fruitful meditation of a priest in the early morning! O happy visits to the silent church, *Solus Solo*—One with one. O the lessons of His *immediate* union with me. The apostle Thomas but touched the Lord's glorified wounds and was wholly renewed in Christian faith—yea and in love and hope and every virtue. I may have the same experience every day at the altar, especially for that virtue which is my spiritual and bodily glory, priestly chastity. I have Him, the Virgin Redeemer, Son of the Virgin Mother, in my hands, on my tongue, in my heart, so glorious and so loving, and O so pure. My Mass is the daily renewal of a *perfectly chaste* life.

The dignity of the priesthood is established by the Mass in the heights of holiness, so far as the graces of vocation are accepted generously. If "No man can say the Lord Jesus Christ but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. xii, 3), what then of calling Him down from heaven, of offering Him up to heaven and His Father for the world's salvation, of feeding the multitudes with Him? My thoughts, my words and my deeds should spring instinctively from the Holy Ghost within me.

What is that unique grace called the grace of final perseverance? None other than a virtue superior to the lapse of time, the gift of Him who is "Christ yesterday, and today, and the same forever" (Hebrews xiii, 8). To say Mass right is to place the Son of the ever living God

in possession of all my days even unto the dawning of the day of eternity. Every grace, as spiritual writers tell us, forshadows at least dimly, that of final perseverance. How vividly shall this be true with all God's favors to a priest in holy Mass. For "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how hath He not also, with Him given us all things?" (Rom. viii, 32.) Shall not this have a special reference to me? The apostle's meaning embraces the gift of God in the regeneration of baptism, in the pardon of confession, and in the divine gift of communion. What shall be said of a priest, who administers all of these sacraments and by offering Mass makes himself the bestower of the divine Almoner Himself.

CHAPTER III

The Priest's Holiness in His Pastoral Office

"I am the Good Shepherd—The Good Shepherd giveth His life for His sheep. . . .I am the Good Shepherd; and I know mine and Mine know Me. As the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for My sheep. And other sheep I have who are not of this fold; them also must I bring and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd." —(*John x, 11-16*).

"But in all thtngs let us exhibit ourselves as the Ministers of God, in much patience, in tribulation, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in prisons, in seditions, in labors, in watchings, in fastings, in chastity, in knowledge, in long suffering, in sweetness, in the Holy Ghost, in charity unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God."—(*2 Cor. iv, 7*).

HOLY MASS gives me participation in the sacrificial priesthood of Jesus Christ; it places me in jurisdiction over His physical body. The pastoral office, conferred by the same Sacrament of Order, whilst giving me this sacrificial office bestows upon me also a participation in Christ's pastoral office and gives jurisdiction over his mystical body, the Good Shepherd's flock, the souls of men. This is effectuated by my union with the Catholic episcopate presided over by the chief bishop of

Christendom. Thus to the offering of Mass is joined the care of souls. This indeed begins with Mass itself, the giving of Christ in communion; and then the pardon of sins in the sacrament of confession; the preaching of the word of God; the care of the sick; the anointing of the dying; the burial of the dead; and praying for the souls of the departed.

This union of the bishop and his priests and his people is the divine community, "the fold," "the net," "the vine."

What is the holiness to which one thus joined to the Good Shepherd is called? None other than what is known as Evangelical perfection—poverty, chastity and obedience. Poverty. When one enters even the atrium of the priesthood, he kneels to receive from the bishop the first lesson of sacerdotal virtue—disinterestedness, reciting word for word with the ordaining bishop, *"Dominus pars hereditatis meae et calicis mei*—the Lord is my portion of the inheritance and of my cup." Whosoever giveth Christ must be one of His poor, and must be their life-long benefactor. Chastity. To be close to Him he must be worthy of His company who is virgin born and King of virgins, as His mother is their queen. Obedience. To all priests it is said: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross" (Phil. ii, 5-8).

Those who serve the people in parishes are of the typical priesthood. Such a one is veritably the *Alter Ego* of Christ, as already noticed: by baptizing, by Christian

doctrine to men and women and their children, by confession, by assembling them for Mass, by ministry at their departure from life, by private influence and counsel. How truly right was St. John Chrysostom when he said "A priest should be a great soul."

When St. Francis de Sales first put on a cassock, prepared for him by his mother, he felt the act to be a very solemn one. It was to him the seal of his long desired sacrifice of himself to God and immortal souls. One who witnessed the reverence with which he made this change of dress, was so much impressed that he exclaimed: "Really, it looks as if you were taking the habit of a Capuchin." "Ah, Monsieur," replied Francis, "I am taking the habit of St. Peter. It is only by dispensation that we are secularized outwardly. Our inner life should be that of Religious under the rule and in the chains of the Prince of the Apostles."

What class of priests should be the most holy? That kind upon whose perfection the largest number of souls depend for salvation; parish priests. Who is first among men? He whose vocation of loving God and men is most imperative and most closely identified with that of Christ crucified. None other so nearly resembles God in God's most distinguishing attribute—love. The priest appointed to save men's souls is called to a perfection of virtue more closely like that of Christ in its inspiration, its development, its responsibility and its rewards.

Look at conditions from a layman's point of view. My pastor is the master of my doctrine; to him I have a divine right of applying privately for the solution of all my doubts and difficulties; he has a divine right to place me among his people for public instruction. How enlightened

should he be. When I go to confession he has a divine right to discuss my conscience in its most secret thoughts. How close to the Holy Spirit should he be! My wife has and my little girls and boys have a divine right to discover to him their most delicate matters of conscience, and he has a divine obligation of considering their communications and deciding on them. How pure a man should he be! If I happen to be a man of means he is the almoner of my charities. How honest and disinterested a man should he be! If I am stricken with a pestilential disease I have a divine right to the risk of his life in ministering to me. How heroic a man should he be! How versatile should be the holiness of a pastor of souls.

Hence when a rightly qualified pastor dies how instinctively do his people say: That priest was a saint. It is not merely virtue that is properly his but the highest order of virtue; prevailing and energized virtue; virtue enlightened in principle; instinctive with God's Spirit; virtue enthroned; virtue imparting and administering virtue.

St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "For as the body is one, and hath many members. . . .so also is Christ. Now you are the body of Christ and members of members" (2 Cor. xii, 12-27). In holy Mass the priest is interiorly absorbed in the life of the Redeemer through His living self physically. Mystically he is absorbed into the divine Heart of the Good Shepherd for the salvation of His flock.

Ours should be a fiery spirit of zeal, an absorbing love of souls—as a lover of art is absorbed before a masterpiece. Here is God's likeness, a human soul, smeared

with filth, trampled under foot, tossed away amid waste and rubbish. Our zeal should be a restless energy, a sleepless vigilance. A child of God is lost, I am to find and recover it; it is dead, and I am to call it back to life.

To an ambassador of the Savior the only relation of soul to soul is that of one who saves and another who needs salvation. The divine sociology is the bringing together of apostles and immortal souls. The influence of this conviction on the practice of personal saintliness is decisive; the result is a kind of man whose character is wholly formed by zeal for the salvation of other men. What sort of a man am I? My answer should be, what sort of virtue is the Good Shepherd's zeal for souls. And in simple good sense, a man lacking virtue himself should not undertake to give it to others, for he does not know what he is about, if he does not know what he is giving; virtue is known by experience; he is intruding into a holy work with counterfeit credentials; whatever else a man teaches he must teach himself, good or bad; he must offer himself as a specimen.

Zeal for souls is a charity that begins at home. No messenger is too good to be fit to offer the gift of Eternal joy. And it depends on the giver to attract his beneficiary, for the gospel is "a hard saying" (John vi, 60) to many. The love of God is taught by words and deeds: deeds may serve without words, but words without deeds, hardly. This question is inevitable: Show me how this is done, this strange message. There are two kinds of floods; one enriching the soil as the gentle, gradual inundations of the Nile. Egypt adored the Nile. Another is that of the mountain torrent, rushing out of its banks and hopelessly destroying the fertile farms, covering

them with sand and gravel. Men hate such a river; just as the Egyptians adored the Nile. So a pastor may be a torrent, as destructive as a mountain stream overflowing its banks.

Zeal is disinterested. The wisdom of nature is to work for oneself, of nature and of the world. "But the wisdom of this world is folly with God" (1 Cor. iii, 19). It is only our fallen nature that approves interested motives. Regenerate nature finds it wisest to work for others. The religion of Christ is a religion founded on sacrifice—self-sacrifice. The sacrificial man offers himself to others. This trait of character is enough to change the face of the world and has done it. In this work the priest is a leader, a commander of thousands; one who plans for others; and schools them in virtue.

A priest must realize his position. He is not a private man; he is Christ's public official. In civil life there are men above other men, governors, judges, mayors; so is the priest a public man in the City of God. What secular officials are for ordering the civil life of a city, he is for managing the worship and the love of God in a parish; he is a judge for the pardon of sin; truth and virtue as left us by Jesus Christ is his to arrange, to impart, diligently to oversee.

Sacrifice! After all, it is suffering that tells the tale. Facts speak louder than words; tears speak louder than facts, tears and blood. Suffering is the final test—nay almost the unique test of love; and generally it is the only *practical test.* Dreary suffering; work that is tedious, like instructing converts, or instructing a stupid half-grown Catholic man for first communion; work that is irritating, like instructing unruly children; work that is

fatiguing—driving ten miles every Sunday; steadfast persistence after repeated failure—all this and more is welcome to a true pastor.

It is easy to be eloquent before a fine audience—but alone with a solitary blockhead! To come down from the mountain of beatitudes and settle disputes between stupid disciples. It is hard to be persuasive with a numbskull but a numbskull has a conscience to be enlightened and hereafter will rejoice or grieve as long as God shall live. Is it easy for you to be eloquent? but can you be kind—always kind? Not without suffering.

A true pastor is constantly asking himself: What sacrifices for souls have you made? Jesus Christ offered up the sacrifice of His life—and you?

In what degree am I identified with suffering? I ought to be identified with it, nailed to it. "That I may live with Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Gal. ii, 19). I take my name from sufferings: a priest is one who sacrifices, a Christian priest sacrifices Jesus Christ. One cannot be nailed to the cross but that the cross is nailed to him. A layman is christened: I am crucified.

Over what extent does a priest's zeal for souls extend? Over everything here and hereafter.

In making the babe an heir of heaven and a brother of Jesus Christ.

In sowing the seed of infinite truth and love in the child's little soul.

In shutting the gate of hell and opening the gate of heaven to penitent sinners in the sacrament of penance.

In feeding the soul and body with the real and literal Christ.

In assembling multitudes of adorers about God's altar

on which is enthroned their God-brother and their Redeemer.

In smoothing the pillow of the sick with the touch of Christ's own hand; and in banishing the phantoms of despair from the death bed.

In stilling men's sobs and wiping away their tears in Purgatory.

Against this, O this divine ministry, indolence stolidly resists; and self-indulgence conspires with it; the companionship of priests without hearts; low views of priestly virtue.

You desire to be a priest? But I say to you that if you become a priest unless you save the souls of men you shall not save your own. The answer: *Adsum!* Was there ever such a condition exacted for the practice of virtue? Unheard of heroism on the one hand, the sweet but awful tyranny of zeal on the other.

"But if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?" (Tim. iii, 5.) If I fail with my own passions, how shall I succeed with those of other men? "Let a man," challenges the same apostle, "look upon us as the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. iv, 1). A bold challenge. But how does *God* grade these His ministers? The apostle answers immediately: "For I think that God hath set forth us apostles the last, as it were men appointed unto death; because we are made a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men." Such is God's will with the apostolic ministry. As to how we are graded by men—do I want to know how devoutly I should administer my office? Just as devoutly as a pious layman receives my ministrations.

St. Vincent de Paul often had to wait on the queen of France to obtain her alms; the room was lined, walls and ceiling, with mirrors. "Does this glare and reflection annoy you?" he was asked. He answered: "No; it helps me better to understand God's knowledge of me." Next to consciously living in God's sight is to live consciously—as a true priest ever does—in the glare and mirroring of men's eyes.

"Such was his fervor that in whatever he did, he seemed to exceed the strength of man." Thus speaks Alban Butler of St. Columba, monastic founder, and apostle of North Britain. Unless men see their priest to be their superior in all spiritual things, they can only receive his divine gifts instrumentally—as a mere messenger; personally men and he are on a footing of equality; worse, some of them cannot help feeling they are his superior. Holiness of life and zeal for souls are qualities that a good priest never separates. His love of virtue and his love of imparting virtue are the two pillars of his triumphal arch.

Listen to St. Paul's affection for his converts, the Phillipians: "Therefore my dearly beloved brethren, and most desired, my joy and my crown: so stand fast in the Lord my dearly beloved" (Phil. iv, 1). No wonder he thus speaks, since it is the supreme love of Jesus for souls that the apostle feels. Do I feel it? It should be mine as well as the apostle's. As he was, so too am I associated with the Son of God in loving and saving souls. That men may know and love Jesus I must so live and act as to make people say: "He is another Good Shepherd." Let me ask myself: In what degree am I worthy of the title?

My parish is territorial. Of course more essentially it is made up of souls; but it is limited within a fixed area. And *all* the souls in that area are assigned to my pastoral care by the Good Shepherd through the bishop of my diocese. Hence I have set up my book-rack of missionary literature in the entry way of my church; hence I keep a small circulating library of convert making books; I also have my Sunday night Question Box service; I cultivate a tendency to print Catholic matter in the secular press; again, I advertise and provide a course of doctrinal lectures in Lent; I hold a weekly Inquiry Class. I never omit the annual mission to non-Catholics.

Whatsoever else I am as parish priest, I am *ex-officio* a convert-maker. Every sermon I preach must have something for non-Catholics who are possibly "listening in." All my very devout people are my trained sub-apostles and some of them are my convert instructors. All my Catholic people are an apostolate of prayer for conversions. It shall never be said by non-Catholics in my parish: "We did not know that you Catholics wanted to make converts," the like of which is said in some places. As a parish priest I have some advantages for convert-making over regular missionaries: I am *personally* acquainted with many of those whom I am striving to convert; and in a general way I am acquainted with all of them. And right here and now I am "always on the job." The intensive farmer makes the largest crop; I am that kind of a farmer.

CHAPTER IV

The Divine Office

ALL of the priest's prayer is Eucharistic. Let others cultivate devotions approved by holy Church and we will join in them according to circumstances. But we are devoted essentially to the holy Sacrifice. We precede it with meditative prayer, follow it with prayer of thanksgiving, frequent its sanctuary with our visits, gather our people about it for their common worship and consecrate them with its Benediction.

The Mass is placed in the midst of the Divine Office, which is the prayer of the Breviary; the Mass is the crown and glory of the priest's prayer: its sublime liturgical language reproducing the *Event* of Calvary giving all prayer its merit and its holiness. Angels and men are thus sanctified and not otherwise; the Church militant, suffering and triumphant. But together with Holy Mass the Divine Office—that is to say the Godlike *Duty*—holds the place of honor. Its words are very largely taken from the ancient Scriptures whilst its consummation on the altar fulfills all prophecies and gives heavenly cadence to its marvellous praises.

How significant a name *Divine Office*. The word office means duty; here is the divine duty of life, the divinest function. St. Benedict in his Holy Rule gives the Office a synonym, the *Opus Dei*—God's work. Can

one conceive of any relation of man to God so adequately expressed as it is by the Divine Office, perfected and crowned by the holy Sacrifice—literally the official and authentic address of Christ and His Church to the Supreme Being. Hence it is regulated with sacred minuteness, its modes and methods to be observed under unheard of penalties. It is the Church's universal prayer, the Christian world's chorus of worship. The Breviary is adoration, praise, contrition, love, hope and faith, all best expressed, divinely expressed. It is essentially our race's prayer and its supreme literature; its poetry, history, oratory; it is divinely didactic; pathetically emotional, prophetic, sad, joyful and triumphant. Reading the Breviary the priest roams at will in a paradise of wisdom and love. It is the marrow of God's Scriptures, the book of which the Church dogmatically proclaims that "God is its author." Yet the Breviary is a book sometimes raced through with indecent haste and with a spirit no better than perfunctory. Yet it is the volume of the love letters between the priest's soul and its divine Spouse.

If the priest is the favorite child of God then the Breviary is his family literature. It is God's book. The words of the priest should be the echo of his Father's voice. "Our conversation is in heaven" (Phil. iii, 20). If God be the Bible's author "in all its parts," what must our Breviary be?—since it is composed of special selections, the best of every part, God's characteristic writings, His masterpieces, and on the part of His children their sweetest sighs, their most jubilant alleluias; only here and there, and that briefly, having some comments by our most holy, wise and learned Fathers and Doctors. All

is arranged and distributed throughout the year, with ever varying lights of heavenly beauty.

This book is the prayer book of the elite of mankind; bishops, priests, monks, nuns, grave professors; secluded hermits, heroic missionaries, devoted parish priests—hard driven, picking their steps amid many dangers as they guide immortal souls towards paradise—in every clime and in all nations. The Breviary is the heart beat of Christ's universal and eternal priesthood.

Sometimes a renowned author gives public readings of selections from his own works: a peculiar pleasure to him; keener joy would be to see the souls of those who read the volumes privately and are elevated, entranced by them. With God and the priest reading his Breviary it is both one and the other: we officially speak these words, as standing for God; and God speaks them, for His words are eternally His: and He is part of our office; and He is present with each of us, teaching us truth and truthfulness and loyalty to truth, melting us with tenderness; heartening us to "cry Abba, Father!" (Mark xiv, 36.) Reverence, confidence, consolation, power, love are breathed forth in reciting the Breviary.

Consider the dignity of prayer and praise, and thereby learn both the honor done us in our being officially appointed to this highest of prayers; and of God having compared and arranged the very words of our petitions. O God the Holy Spirit! Grant us the gift of tongues, fiery tongues for this Thy Apostolic prayer. I cannot work miracles; but having charity I speak with the tongues both of men and angels declaring the wonderful things of God.

Hence one of the graces of the ecclesiastical state is to

say the Office with the fruit of virtue. Just as part of our careful education and instruction is to say it with rubrical exactness.

Of an author, we say that he is suggestive and thought provoking; an author whose best wisdom is found if we know how to read between the lines. In reading God's writings the wisdom between the lines is that which is "spiritually examined" (1 Cor. ii, 14). This is what it means to be separated from the multitude and *"Mancipatus Ecclesiae;"* and also what is the dignity of one who is the physician, the pastor, the father of immortal souls; and what is meant by the Gloria Patri, so often repeated as to mark with the seal of the divine Trinity the entire cadence of our praise.

How inseparably the welfare of all mankind is associated with the piety of the clergy in reciting Office. How little by little prayer, and especially this prayer, is proved to be also a work of zeal for souls.

Consider the Breviary recited by a priest living among infidels who know not God; heretics who hate the lovely truth and Church of Jesus Christ; sinful Catholics, whose lives are offensive to God and scandalous to men—dying sinners; sorely tempted souls. It is a divinely efficacious prayer amid these conditions of holy adventure and sacred exile in which the priest and his prayer are in eloquent contrast with the fallen world about him.

Whole nations are awaiting redemption, and this is the official prayer of their missionaries and saviors; and how well we know that the prayers of a priest sanctify his preaching, enlarge his heart, quicken his sympathies, soften the natures of his hearers—nay, these prayers often enrich his mind with thoughts of

peculiar force for convincing unwilling spirits and converting heretics.

"Is any of you sad? Let him pray. Is he glad? Let him sing" (James v, 3). Pray and sing! pray and sing! All the voices of devout souls are echoes of angelic love and heavenly courage, finally to change into eternal joy and peace. The sweetest tones of instruments are harsh and mechanical compared with the human voice; above all created sweetness is that of the herald of the true religion to earnest souls. In the Divine Office this most enchanting of all music is practiced and perfected.

"In the sight of angels I will sing to Thee, O my God" Ps. cxxxvii, 1). *"Sancta Maria et omes sancti, intercedite pro nobis ad Dominum Deum nostrum."* Show me the priest for whom time slips away unperceived while reciting his office. It interests him—really and positively he enjoys it: *"Quis est hic et laudabimus eum?"* (Ecclus. xxi, 9.) Yet it is also of absorbing interest to the heavenly community of the angels. As we approach that community we near God's great Choir. St. John of the Cross was dying. Awaking from a stupor he heard the bell for midnight Office. "What is that bell?" he asked. They told him. He answered: "I will chant matins with the angels;" and so he did. Many priests are uneasy on their deathbeds as they think of approaching that Choir—their consciences reprove them for hurry in reciting Office, a routine spirit, a mere habit, or a legalistic conformity; all with many wilful distractions.

We are not offering, least of all pressing, suggestions about methods of saying Office; or convenient daily divisions of its parts. Something like common agreement

approves what is called "anticipating," that is reciting matins and lauds the afternoon or evening of the day preceding the actual day assigned. This enables one to recite the rest of the Office before and right after midday. And one should make sure of a quiet, secluded place. As to proper fulfilment of the stern rubric *"attente ac devote,"* St. Alphonsus, the foremost of the Church's moralists, approves three states of mind. First, to follow the literal sense, making sure of knowing just what one is saying. Second, the general sense, mindful of the festival, or the ecclesiastical season. Third, a yet more personal spiritual motive, earnestly petitioning for some much desired favor for one's self or others, palpitant with some acute suffering, craving light in some perplexing crisis.

But unless one settles his mind and adjusts his time so as to recite the Office leisurely he will soon have to reckon with God's protest in his conscience. When St. Peter Damian felt he was about to die it was at the midnight hour of matins. He had a group of his monks gather about his deathbed and recite the Office there, joining them with his fading strength. His biographer says: "He passed from that occupation which had ever been the delight of his heart on earth, to sing the same praises in heaven."

We priests should note that the passages in the Breviary to which some of us pay least attention, are the ones which are the whole Divine Office of our people—*Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Credo, Confiteor, Magnificat, Gloria Patri.* By reciting these and such like "trite" things (to us) *"attente ac devote"* they save their souls, whilst we (too often) recite them whilst turning over the pages of

the divine book. St. Francis of Assisi said to his friars: "Brothers, learn what the *Gloria Patri* means, and you will know the whole of the sacred Scriptures." On the portal of a great Cathedral we sometimes see the hinges, all made of fine bronze, affixed to the door in artistic forms, reaching far toward its limits. How much depends on a priest's prayer; it is in its sacred forms and substance the hinges of his whole sacerdotal existence.

CHAPTER V

The Priest's Poverty

WHEN the apostles made claim of their discipleship, they said to their Master: "We have left all things and followed Thee" (Mark x, 28), He answered them: "You have left all things and followed Me, in the regeneration you shall be seated on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." They could hardly do otherwise than be dedicated to poverty whilst in His following. Before Jesus Christ became man He was the infinite God; but He emptied Himself taking the form of a servant. (Phil. ii, 7.) When He began His public life he had a home, it was poor enough, but it was a shelter; and it was His. But when He totally gave Himself up to His Father's work He affirmed (as if boasting) that "the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of Man hath not whereon to lay His head" (Matt. viii, 20). It was therefore especially for His own state of life, namely the care of souls, that He selected as the leading glory of His mission the first beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. v, 3). When he called Matthew to His close company from the receipt of customs, "immediately rising up he followed Him" (Matt. ix, 9), running away from gathering money to the gathering up fragments after a feast upon a "grassy place" (John vi, 12). Jesus never ceased to enforce this rule, saying always "Every one of you that doth not renounce all that

he possesseth, cannot be My disciple" (Luke xiv, 33). He often spoke thus; for sake of emphasis He constantly repeats it as if both to stamp the doctrine of apostolic poverty upon their minds, and (if we dare say so) to commit Himself irrevocably to it.

Nor had the doctrine of having nothing as a qualification of fitness for the priesthood ever been a novelty among God's people. Ages before Our Lord's coming the tribe of Levy being set apart for priestly offices, was enriched by poverty only. The prophet Ezechiel explained in God's name, the essential meaning: "And they [the priestly tribe] shall have no inheritance; I am their inheritance; neither shall you give them any possession in Israel; for I am their possession" (Ezech. xliv, 28). And thus when the young Christian Levite takes his first step towards the altar of Christ exclaiming *Adsum!* it is to kneel at the ordaining bishop's knees to be tonsured, that is to say, shorn, reciting in unison with the prelate the primary and everlasting promise of poverty: *Dominus pars hereditatis meae et calicis mei*—The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup" (Ps. xv, 5).

I am not asking of you the poverty of St. Francis of Assisi, though there is a charm in it. By a divine inpulse this Poor Man of Christ contracted mystical marriage with Lady Poverty, as he called that virtue. Each of us in his place and measure may do something like this, saying. I am wedded to poverty. A man's wife is his equal, nay, she rules him by her sweetness; she is entitled to his support, his company; his leisure is hers; his love is divinely measured thus: "A man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife" (Mark x, 7). Thus in very truth does a priest renounce his parents and his

happy home and be joined to poverty in austere mystical espousals.

Poverty is commonly named first among the three evangelical counsels; it is given first place by our Redeemer among the eight beatitudes. Now these three counsels are, in a true sense, one and inseparable. You cannot lessen one without scaling down the others, for love is the essence of all. An injury to poverty hurts the love that is in chastity and in obedience. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, but offend in one point, is become guilty of all" (James ii, 10). Love of the lawgiver is that relation which pervades every commandment, counsel and virtue. Love is, as it were, the spinal column of our spiritual frame; wound that and some degree of paralysis results everywhere. In regard to poverty, which is too often the first virtue that suffers, it must be said that it is essentially connected with all religious vitality.

Consider its connection with chastity; the chaste man is pinched in every self indulgence. St. John the Baptist was the most austere of poor men; and God made him a martyr not of austerity but of holy chastity. No vice is so spendthrift as guilty love. It revels in feasting and in "soft garments" and in Latin is named luxury—*luxuria*. Lust must have money, especially its worst form, refined lust.

Consider poverty's relation to obedience. This is a virtue which may be called the bull dog of the priest's treasury. Obedience gives a priest's poverty a rule. By its terms it forms a questionnaire: "Is this money to be spent on myself? or on my relatives?" Then "beware the dog." Is it to be spent on the poor, or on religion? Then take what you like, take all.

Consider poverty and zeal for souls. No man loves souls well enough to haunt up sinners, or to spend dreary hours in instructing converts, but that he ignores money, nay detests it. The Holy Ghost says in the Book of Wisdom: "And I preferred her before kingdoms and thrones, and esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her. Neither did I compare unto her any precious stone; for all gold in comparison of her, is as a little sand: and silver in respect to her shall be counted as clay. . . .And *God hath given me to speak as I would, and to conceive thoughts worthy of those things that are given me:* because He is the guide of wisdom, and the director of the wise" (Wisdom vii, 8-15). Until one has weighed gold and the gospel against each other he does not know either gold or the gospel; or not well enough to talk wisely about either one of them.

A merchant can talk about his merchandise; and a pastor can talk about the gospel—about sorrow for sin, and the blood of Jesus Christ. You cannot be eloquent about the value of the Gospel till you have gauged its value at your own expense. Can you prove to men that gold and silver are of more worth than sand and clay?—a test question for a pastor of souls; it is decided beforehand by your own inner and outer estimation of such things. I could hire a lawyer to do it—as a hireling. He would act the part of advocate according to his talent in acting parts—it is his trade. A man works well at his trade, for it is his livelihood. But we are not hired; we are called by God: not a trade but a divine vocation is ours, not a livelihood but a career of life and death and a divine interest; not ambition to win a name but a consuming fire of love for Jesus Christ and immortal souls.

In that same Book of Wisdom, chapter ii, verse 6, the Holy Spirit thus contrasts a soft life with that of a zealous priest; voicing the sentiment of self-indulgent spirits: "Come, therefore, and let us enjoy the good things that are present, and let us speedily use creatures as in youth. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments, and let not the flower of the time pass by us. . . .Let none of us go without his part in luxury." I have known pastors who were fools about divine things and wise and even learned about wines—tasters and experts in such dainties. I have known those who gladly went into the kitchen and prepared dishes fit for epicures, outdoing the cook; but to go into the confessional they must be stung and dragged. Mingle such sentiments as zeal for saving sinners and the joy of a comfortable bank account if you can.

Judge a man by his home; not a few of our pastors live in palaces. St. Teresa wrote to her nuns: "If, with a good conscience, I could wish that the day you build a costly dwelling it may fall and kill you all—I say, if I could do so with good conscience—I would wish it and beg God to grant it" (Way of Perfection, Stanbrook, Ch. ii, 6). If you would win God's favor, then be like God's Son in regard to this world's goods. Even if you would win men's favor—yea rich men's—be and show yourself absolutely disinterested. In your house and your clothing and all your personal environment cultivate and exhibit an entire detachment from the enjoyments of the well-to-do class or your career will be a calamitous failure.

"Only give me ten truly detached [disinterested] men, and I do not despair of converting the world with them."

This was a saying of St. Phillip Neri, treating of the virtue of poverty.

Of a certain rich Catholic family it was said: "The poor and the sick, the hospitals and the asylums were the only ones who knew that they were rich." An example to pastors of wealthy parishes. A true Christian—least of all a pastor, can have no use for money except to give it to the poor or to religion.

Make Providence your steward, yea your banker. God alone gives you all, He alone gives you the spirit in which to use all. St. John of the Cross speaking of a soul tried by God and led on to higher states of prayer, tells of its receiving from Him its "bread with the crust on"—the bread of the strong and of the poor. This is God's way: his best graces are often accompanied with some hard but very nutritious trial. Shall we carefully pare off the crust? pick and choose the sweet morsels of life? —our company, our occupations, our rooms, clothing, furniture? Or rather let God do all for us by His Providence, viz, our prelates and our rule of life; and the pattern of our more edifying brethren. An old monk of the desert was starting to dig a new well nearer to his cell; while wearily journeying to the old one he saw an angel counting and recording his footsteps. He did not dig the new well.

When one advances so far in the love of God as that his only treasure is Christ, all money has lost its value to him. St. Teresa says: "When I was at my prayers and in my mind saw Christ on the cross, so poor and destitute, I could not bear to be rich, and I emplored Him with tears so to order matters that I might be as poor as He was" (Life, ch. xxxv). The heathen Danes hav-

ing taken Canterbury by storm in 1012 bound St. Elphege, the Archbishop, in chains. They then set on him a ransom of an immense sum of money. He answered: "I have no other gold to offer than that of true wisdom, which consists of the knowledge and worship of the living God." Upon which they put him to death—a martyr of holy poverty.

When shall we trust wholly in God?—as the saints always did. When St. Alphonsus Liguori was striving to start his congregation, out of many thousands of priests in the Kingdom of Naples doing nothing for souls, he could for a long time get not one to join him in preaching to the poor. One, who was balancing about it, pointed to the saint's lack of means. and lack of hopes of any, saying: "But what support have you?" He answered quickly: "We have God" (Berthe's Life, Bk. ii, ch. v).

CHAPTER VI

The Priest's Chastity

IN THE rite of ordination to the subdiaconate, as soon as the bishop's call is answered by the young Levite's *Adsum* and the memorable step forward is taken, he falls prostrate on the ground as if he were struck with the sacrificial axe; and all recite the Litanies over him. The same solemn oblation is made before the diaconate, and again before the priesthood; done in each case with all the divine meaning of vocation, covenant, power and privilege; but shall we not recognize in all this the divine sealing of that most solemn of all canonical vows, that of stainless priestly chastity? I vow and swear by the truth of Jesus Christ that I will preach His gospel with lips burnt clean by the fire of His altar; I vow and swear by the blood of Jesus Christ that with His blood I will purge my blood clean of every filthy humor of lust; I vow and swear by the mind of Jesus Christ that I will cleanse my thoughts of every foul tendency to lust.

And now let him say to men and devils what Our Lord said to the Pharisees: "Which of you shall accuse Me of sin?" (John viii, 46.)

In holy Mass immediately after the consecration of the sacred elements, the priest extends his right hand over them and offers them to the heavenly Father three times, saying: *"Hostiam puram, Hostiam sanctam, Hostiam immaculatam*—a pure offering, a holy offering, a spotless offering, with the cross of Jesus signed and sealed upon

them at each of the three praises of Christ's Eucharistic purity. O my Savior, could I be offered by Thee to Thy Father, Thou High Priest of God, in the full truth of those sublime words! O make me pure, holy, stainless! This boon I crave through the intercession of thy holy and immaculate Mother.

O priestly soul, consider thy sacrifice of the altar, its origin in the councils of the Holy Trinity, its realization in the womb of Mary, its consummation upon Calvary. Consider what happens in thy hands and under thy eyes every time thou sayest Mass, the angels adoring round about thee with the awestruck people of God; and now remember thy vow of chastity.

None of the great accompaniments of the Incarnation compares with the holy Mother's purity, the queen of virgins, the virgin Mother. This purity was singled out by the Holy Ghost in prophesy as the note of identification. "And behold a virgin shall conceive and shall bring forth a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel, God with us" (Isaias vii, 14). Consider the whole meaning of all this in your call to personal purity; and realize that the keeping of this virtue is to some priests the most perilous of tasks: the eternal charity of God and my chastity being inextricably united together. What sort of a body is that of a priest? One fit for Jesus to take into His arms saying: This is *My* Body! As He loves His Mother's chastity so does He love His priest's—nay, as He loves His own chastity so does He love mine.

When chastity is in question it may be a matter of perfection, but it must be a matter of salvation: in this there is seldom a trifling matter. I once read of a railroad engineer who saved the lives of his passengers

by running his engine full speed across a burning bridge. One may feel clad in his priesthood as in a coat of mail; but my armor may sink me deeper in the flood and drown me.

Pure souls are given a special honor in heaven. "These are they who were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These follow the lamb withersoever He goeth. These were purchased from among men, the first fruits to God and to the Lamb" (Apoc. xiv, 4). Again, gaze upon Calvary and behold the Virgin's Son crucified, the virgin of virgins herself standing by, two stainless married women, John the virgin disciple whom Jesus loved, and then the Magdalen, the foremost of penitents. Now a Catholic priest is the one privileged above all others to perpetuate that triumph of purity and propagate its graces.

The following is taken from a letter of St. Francis Xavier to one of the Superiors of the Jesuits in India (Coleridge's *Life of St. Francis Xavier,* Vol. ii, p. 441). "None belonging to us should converse with women, whatever may be their age, rank or condition, except in a public place, such as the church. They should not visit them in their own homes, unless they are in danger of death or in extreme necessity. Even then they should not be visited save in the presence of their husbands or relations; if they have no relations at hand, let it be before respectable persons of the neighborhood, but never without witnesses, such as, in case of need, could give their testimony to what they have seen."

O Mary Immaculate, who has a better right to call thee Mother than I? I am thy Son's priest, His *Alter Ego;* I am thy children's dearest brother; I am thy sex's

best comfort and strongest protector. O Mary, I beg thy favor for all young priests; do thou guard them safely, do thou guide them to practice such a rule of life as shall cleanse them by frequent confession, and daily meditation; and shall safeguard them from all dangerous occasions. Debauched creatures shall come to thy priest as to a cleansing fountain. The hard tempted young layman shall find in him the very inspiration of courage to fight valiantly.

One may feel discouraged at the persistence and cunning of the devil—but only for a moment; we realize quickly that he is essentially the slave of man. Next to his everlasting separation from God the principal torment of Satan is that he is under the feet of the Man-God Jesus, and of the woman, virgin Mother of the Man-God. And every man—but especially Christ's priest—is Satan's master. But the evil one can triumph over him if he finds him a feeble and timid master. One feels now and then that if left to himself he is a toy of the devil. But he quickly finds help—O so joyfully—so that the cunning of Satan with his awful strength is no match for the feeblest mortal who loves and trusts Jesus Christ. St. Augustine's experience in violent temptation is instructive: "I was never more wretched, and Thou, O Lord, wast never more close to me. Nearer and nearer came Thy right hand to pluck me out of the mire and rescue me—whilst I knew it not" (Confessions, Bk. vi, ch. xvi).

Always face to face with enemies? But so is a soldier on the battle front. We should be glad to face such hateful enemies as devils. How glad should we be to attack them! How mighty our weapons! though they

may seem feeble—words, but words which are none other than the names of Christ, His Mother, His saints; signs and motions, but these are the cross and the altar and the tabernacle of God among men—nay the simple element of blessed water upon which the prayer of God's Church has breathed the Holy Spirit. How glorious such a combat and the crown that rewards it with victory—the strife of a child of God, brother of Jesus Christ, heir of heaven—nay a priest of Christ, His *Alter Ego*.

As to our treacherous enemy within, our own self, the flesh, it is not enough that *He* should be beaten and routed; no for we must bear in mind that he is destined to dwell with us in our home till death and always to be a hateful enemy. Therefore after we defeat him we must press on and subjugate him, humiliate him, tyrannize over him, enslave him, watch him, and bitterly hate him to the end. So that, as God said of sin in the early days, "the lust thereof shall be under thee, and thou shalt have dominion over it" (Gen. iii, 7).

Father Thomas of Jesus, prayerfully commenting on the petition of the Our Father, "Lead us not into temptation," writes thus: "Finish Thy work, O Lord; take care of me, do Thou conduct me, and deliver me from the temptations which disturb me. Thou wilt not, O Eternal Father, that Thy children be tempted above their strength; and Thou knowest what we lose if it should happen that we are overcome. Tempt us, try us, according to Thy will; but assist us, and triumph in us by the force of Thy love" (Sufferings of Christ, xiii).

The rules of decorum between me and persons of the other sex, are elevated to rules of the picket line in time of war—no exceptions, no interpretations, blind observ-

ance, automatic, instinctive. "Chastity," says St. Francis de Sales, "is a timid virtue; it is frightened by shadows." This extends to communications with women friends, benefactors, beneficiaries, relatives, old persons, little children.

Blessed John of Avila spent a long life in labors for the souls of men—and also of women. But he never admitted any woman into his house, whatever her age or condition. The women who called to consult him in spiritual matters he held back at the door and sent them into the church to await his coming. And whether he heard their confessions or gave them counsel outside, he kept both parties in full view of whomsoever were present. And yet he led women to sublime heights of holiness.

Holy Mary guard the gate of my eyes, and set St. Joseph thy spouse to guard the gate of my ears. But, dear Mother, I believe that both thyself and thy spouse will be needed to guard the inner gates of my thoughts against my carnal enemies.

The extreme of circumspection and self-restraint, guided by acute self-distrust—this should be the mind of one who would deal with the other sex, even for the holiest purposes. Like a stop watch: only a little spring to be touched and one's very *thoughts* are halted instantly. This is the unanimous teaching of the saints; this wisdom is sadly justified by the fatal results of any other rule of conduct.

Nor need one be uncouth or ill mannered. Venerable Joseph Benedict Cattolengo summed up rules of external demeanor thus: "Head erect and downcast eyes; for modesty nestles not in stooping heads, but in closed eyes."

Closed eyes, or just as good, averted eyes. In fact it is no more than good manners not to stare straight into any person's face, and if the person be a woman this is also chaste manners.

Hence the universal custom of revealing temptations against chastity—in confession—there is no sin to be told but there is a wholesome humiliation, and often need of advice. In this matter advice should very readily be sought. And tell me why the custom has become established of speaking of chastity as "the holy virtue?" Is not charity the holy virtue by excellence? Undoubtedly; but if charity be the castle, chastity is a work which commands it.

When St. Dominic was about to die he called his friars about his bed to give them his last message, and he said to them: "Divine mercy has preserved my virginity unsullied to this day; if you desire the same grace, shun all dangerous intimacy" (Lacordaire's *Life of St. Dominic*).

One must be cautious even to excess; indeed excessive caution guarded by a military, even a martinet discipline, is the only effective caution. May God preserve us from spending our leisure among women!

CHAPTER VII

The Priest's Obedience; and His Rule of Life

Some Words of Scripture:

Whereas indeed He was the Son of God He learned obedience.—Heb. v, 8.

"My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me."—(John iv, 34.)

"Purifying your souls in the obedience of charity, with a brotherly love."—(1 Peter i, 22.)

"For obedience is better than sacrifices; and to hearken, rather than the fat of rams."—(1 Kings xiii, 22.)

"Why have I hated instruction, and my heart consented not to reproof"?—(Prov. v, 12.)

"He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them."—(Luke ii, 51.)

"He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."—(Phil. ii, 8.)

"He that heareth you, heareth Me: and he that despiseth you despiseth Me."—(Luke x, 6.)

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."—(Matt. xxviii, 20.)

"Let every soul be subject to higher powers, for there is no power but from God."—(Romans xiii, 1.)

THE following is the vow and oath of the priest who is to serve souls in a diocese; it is made in the hands of his bishop at ordination: "I vow and swear that I

will perpetually devote my labors and my zeal to the performance of my sacred duties for the salvation of souls, wholly under the guidance and jurisdiction of the Right Reverend Ordinary of this diocese." This vow of obedience is dispensable only by the Holy See. It is not only the equivalent of the vow of obedience of Religious to the guidance and jurisdiction of their superiors, but it is in all reality a sort of an apostolic vow.

Such is the comment of the late Cardinal Vaughan in his introduction to the Life of St. John Baptist de Rossi. No Religious order, he insists, makes more stringent provision for "stability." It even exceeds the usual Religious vow of active orders, by first confining a priest's labors to his diocese alone; and second, under a superior in whose appointment he has had no part directly or indirectly. So far Cardinal Vaughan.

I have read of St. Francis Xavier writing to one of his fathers to obey the vicar general of a diocese "scrupulously." This term is generally applied to the nervous exaggeration of a fault. But it is also applied to a virtue, elevating its most trifling acts into high achievements by the extreme purity of motive and deep affection for the one who is in authority; it thus has a beautiful and noble meaning—as *obeying scrupulously*.

St. Paul said: "Being bound in the spirit I go to Jerusalem" (Acts xx, 22). I cannot conceive of a man less his own master than a parish priest. A monk's superior goes by rule for every word of command to his subject, but what rule can a pastor use, placed over a thousand souls who use this single man for their every need? They can call on him by divine right for all his care, day or night, heaven and hell being in the balance.

"Being bound in the spirit." Such is the significance of the *"Adsum!"* of the ordination rubrics.

It is little to say that the priest is the servant of the servants of God. He is the very slave even of the enemies of God. If there are any degrees in his servitude it is this: the most total forfeiture of his rights, of his very life, is pledged to the least deserving of his people. Minute obedience. Let him if he dare wilfully leave out a syllable in each of twenty different sentences which he pronounces under the most dreadful penalties each day of every week he serves souls—in the awful sacrifice of the altar, in absolving sinners, in ministering to their dying moments; publicly and privately he is theirs for life and death.

The elaborate ceremonial of the Old Law were rubrics from God direct—a lesson in the worth of such things in general, and bearing upon the high prerogative of holy Church to which God in the New Law has committed His office of a divinely appointed rubrician. By reverent obedience to the ceremonies of our religion one honors God by posture of body and tone of voice, as is bid by the term, *"attente ac devote,* exactly and devoutly;" thought and word and motion all in unison. Posture and tone between mortal men are often of immense significance—between children and parents, friend and friend. Especially between the all adorable God and His creature, between Christ and His priest. And this minute and scrupulous affection for the holy rubrics is highly edifying to the people, who know a priest and grade him according to his obedience to those ceremonies (which to them are a foretaste of heaven)—sure tokens of his depth of faith, his fervor of love. Hence a lack of this

kind of obedience indicates a general defectiveness. For besides its own unreasonableness and its demerit, disobedience to the close accompaniments of the offices of divine worship betrays a general demoralization.

The virtue of obedience is in easy possession of the soul only when one readily sees God's will in the rules of his prelate and his diocese. Now it is the Holy Spirit's Gift of Piety which thus perfects obedience—piety, which inclines the hearts of children to their father, which gives affection the place of honor in dealing with others, not mechanical conformity, not even cold conviction of duty. All this indeed; but sentiment besides; patience, gentleness, disinterestedness, affectionate interest. Not merely respect and submission but reverence and awe.

The priest says: The dearest thing I have is my own will; I long to give it to God; I long to give everything to God, all that I have and all that I am; especially my will, my liberty. Jesus gave me no less than Himself, and He did so in obedience to His Father's will. "The word was made flesh" (John i, 14). God thus entrusts Himself to us to obey us. First He is obedient whilst an infant unborn; then as a little nurseling He is obedient to His Mother. As a boy He obeys His foster father absolutely, most affectionately, in his shop and home. Even when He would begin His Gospel, He yet wills not to begin it at the time He had set, because He had rather obey his parents who had set another time. He continues to do till He is thirty years old. O my soul! Hast thou duly valued obedience?

Jesus obeyed the Law of Moses: worn out as it was, every jot and tittle of it had His reverent obedience. He was thus like a son, long since attained to independent

manhood, who yet obeys his aged and decrepit parent. Nay, He obeyed the vile apostles who held the office of the priesthood: He did so to honor the virtue of obedience. He obeyed the cowardly Pilate. He obeyed Judas Iscariot. He obeyed the lowest of the rabble who spat on Him. He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He is now perfectly obedient to every priest and every Christian in the Blessed Eucharist. O my soul! Hast thou rightly appreciated obedience? Hast thou Christ's estimate of the value of this virtue?—if thou dost pick and choose in what things thou shalt obey, if thou dost habitually seek the least and easiest obedience?

I may as well acknowledge my shortcomings. Firstly, I know, that obedience to the external authority of God is the test of interior religious sincerity; and secondly, I confess to God that I have a particular repugnance to obey—and this is a perilous condition of soul. It is not easy, nay, it is not possible to obey the inspirations of grace within my soul—though God is so near and smooths the way, until I recognize God in the person of defective men; the interior God and the exterior God are one God and must be joined in my guidance. A fanatic goes by his inner lights alone; a Christian goes by both inner light and outer obedience. This requires calmness; one must reason; one must listen to brethren as well as hearken to superiors; and must do all this for God. May God grant me these beautiful qualities.

In serious matters I will watch carefully against the slighest uprisings of rebellion. In little matters I will strive incessantly against forgetfulness—if any matter can be called little which Thou, O Lord, deemest important enough to command. If I may call by the name

of forgetfulness that degree of negligence which *can* forget thy will. And O Lord, grant me a special grace to obey in little things since that kind of obedience is the usual current in my life, and it alone can form a holy habit of advertence to Thy majesty; it alone, as a common rule is the obedience I am liable to be called on to practice at any moment.

When there is question even of no more than *views and opinions,* may God grant me that affectionate spirit which yields its views and opinions out of kindly deference to others. Especially may I have the virtue to give up my judgment. Wheresoever conscience is not injured, in favor of my superior's views, or at least to suspend my judgment. Is not their light clearer, since their place is nearer to God than mine?

Jesus, my Master, accept my promises. I promise Thee to bend my will to Thy sweet yoke. I will obey Thy commandments, and Thy counsels, Thy inspirations, Thy Providences, Thy Church. I will obey Thee in all things, great things and little things. I will obey Thee now and forever. I will obey Thee promptly, cheerfully. I will no longer fail in obedience to my Rule of Life and to my superiors.

The Priest's Rule of Life

As here understood a Priest's Rule of Life is a list of observances of a purely spiritual nature, drawn up for personal guidance after consulation with some trusted director or adviser. This the priest signs; and it would be well to have his director sign it as witness. Of course this act supposes high views of vocation, and a grave

personal character. This is not his "Law unto himself" for it is approved as above stated. And furthermore violations of it are to be named in confession, not as sins but for the sake of humility; to seek advice; and as a profession of loyalty to the Rule.

There are pious people not a few who (all unconsciously) are under the delusion that they can be pious without being obedient to a stated regimen of spiritual exercises. But an orderly mind is one in which the knowledge of things is associated with the love of good things and hatred of bad things. An orderly mind is necessary for successful business, or even for pleasant recreation; otherwise one loses grasp of relative values. The religious mind is one which orders all things under God, and gives precedence to the more essential. "With the Lord shall the steps of a man be ordered, and he shall like well his way. When he shall fall he shall not be bruised, for the Lord putteth His hand under him" (Ps. xxxvi, 23).

St. Francis de Sales says that "As in a clock the weights set every wheel in motion and regulate them, so does the love of God create and control all our affections and emotions" (Love of God, Bk. xi, ch. xx). The Rule of Life sets in motion the love of God and "regulates" the responses of one's soul to the impulses of divine grace.

Trust saintly writers; Father Thomas of Jesus says: "Any virtue in which is more self-will than obedience ought to be suspected; and Christ, who sacrificed Himself upon the cross out of obedience, loves obedience better than sacrifice" (Sufferings of Christ, xiv).

The Rule is first and foremost concerned with spiritual exercises pure and simple:

Annual—the diocesan retreat.

Monthly—an interview (usually joined with confession) with one or other proved or trusted spiritual director.

Weekly—confession—to the priest most convenient.

Daily—the exact time of rising; followed by the meditation; the exact time of offering Mass, followed by the thanksgiving; the exact time of the spiritual reading; the exact time of the visit to the Blessed Sacrament; the evening examen; the exact time of the rosary; the exact time for the different divisions of the breviary.[1]

The priest's Rule of Life is what the web is to the spider: he starves without it. It catches omissions; it envelopes them and consumes them in confession.

It reserves for God the dark hours of morning and (part of) those of the evening, and daylight hours for the people; was it not thus that our Savior acted?

When Our Lord called His apostles He found them mending their nets (Matt. iv, 21). Now the net of priestly holiness is the Rule of Life. Our months, days and hours are thus woven together to secure virtues and graces. After doing many good things we fail in some, and then we must stop to mend our nets, not without the help of our confessor and director, rearranging it and tying it up here and there and making it as good as new —The Rule of our priestly Life.

Consider the Rule of *daily meditation.* Without the

1*The Apostolic Union of Secular Priests* is a society of priests who each month personally report to their diocesan director the observance (or omission) of a list of exercises similar to the above, no names being revealed. It is an admirable arrangement and flourishes in some dioceses; one may become a member of the Union of another diocese in case there is none in his own. That of New York: Address the *Director, St. Joseph's Seminary, Yonkers, N. Y.* Of course, the Priests' Eucharistic League for an hour's adoration each week is well known, Address *General Director, 184 East 76th Street, New York.*

Rule of Life, first happens one and then another omission; and finally an era of omissions and ready dispensations supplants observance; one bargains with sloth—never without being cheated—till conscience becomes alarmed and one grows more frank with one's confessor and the net is made whole again. Any priest engaged in saving souls will work more harm to himself than good to others, except he *makes sure* of one daily meditation at a fixed time and place. As a robber watches for a window that we forget to close at night, so does the prowling demon take note of an omission of our daily prayers to rob us of grace. St. Francis de Sales lays this law of penalties and compensations: "If it happens that some pressing necessity calls a Sister to the parlor during the time set by the Rule for prayer, then the time must be made up later, as far as possible, for the omitted meditation" (Conferences, xvi). Tell me if you can why this regulation should not apply to a priest.

Nothing is more efficacious than in such things the humility of the confessional. Says St. Bernard: "Whosoever craves to act as if he were his own master craves to be the servant of a fool." No doubt preaching, instructing, serving the sick, hearing confessions—such things are the outward apostolate of God's chosen ones. Yet with them as with all other works of zeal paramount importance is to be given to silence and prayer. The *good worker* for souls is a man of God and none other. It is he that is "born of God who overcometh the world" (1 John x, 4). The mariner is driven onward by wind and wave. But these cannot tell him what progress he has made; that all necessary information is gained only by his study of the heavens. So not anything in our

earthly apostolate but only God and His angels can fix for us our place in our life's voyage.

The ideal condition is work to be done only when necessity or obedience or charity presses it upon us—and no other work whatsoever. The rest of the time belongs to religion, all of it; except a modicum given to relaxation; and that may be grouped with necessary work. Two mottoes: which will you adopt? *First,* pray when you can, work when you must. *Second,* work when you can, pray when you must. In the divine battle of perfection, no enemy is so fatal to success as that false friend, human prudence.

Consider daily *Spiritual Reading.* The better time for it is that *preceding* the active duties likely to claim the first interval after breakfast—make your spiritual reading before even opening the mail, before touching the newspaper. What shall I read in my Rule of Life? Honor to whom honor. Holy Writ is not so much pre-eminent in literature as it is itself a literature, apart and above all other. Holding that queenly place, the Bible assembles about it all other writings that tell of divine things, not overshadowing and silencing them, but arraying them with royal majesty. These are not inspired, but they are true and holy; and they communicate the wisdom and holiness of God, whose Spirit guided their saintly authors in composing them. The use of all this is among our dearest privileges. Called Spiritual Reading, it is one of the standard means of becoming a holy priest. Reading the Bible and the writings of holy men and women, when practiced daily as a medium of communicating with God and His angels, gives that stronger grasp of virtue, that holier refinement of joy, that pene-

trating insight into the means of life in time and eternity —in a word, that condition of soul known as Christian and priestly perfection. The sacraments, of course, are the principal means of gaining holiness and of advancing therein. But St. Bernard places devout books next to the sacraments. More modern writers, such as St. Teresa and Lallemant, also rate pious reading so high as to mingle it inextricably and place it on an equal footing with the prayers and resolutions that spring out of the divine desire to follow Christ into perfect union with God. The priest who loves to read divine things, whether in or out of Scriptures, will surely lead a saintly life, and in a riper time may himself write and publish some good pages for God's honor, may even write a book. Lay the foundation with this principle: fervor is to be generated by close access to Christ and in no other way. Reading of the life of Christ is entering Christ's school, according to His invitation: "Learn of Me" (Matt. xi, 29). As we learn science by teacher, book and thought, so we learn Christ by meditation, books and prayer. There is no science without books, no art, no inspiration in any meaning of the term. As priestly life is a science, an art, an inspiration, it follows that its books are essentially necessary.

Consider *Spiritual Direction.* Its uses are well summarized by St. Francis de Sales: "There are certain matters in which we are meant to use our own judgment, and in which if we ourselves exercise judgment, we shall not be chastised by God. But there are other things about which we act with our soul's eye, that is our judgment, as we do with our body's eye, which sees all things except itself. In such cases we need a mirror that we

may see ourselves, as well as other things. Now this mirror, as regards interior things, is the person to whom we manifest our conscience, and who is its judge in the place of God" (*Spirit of St. Francis de Sales,* p. 215).

The stabilizing of one's Rule of Life is dependent on obedience to its provisions fixed as a habit of mind. This excludes the bane of instability, by which inclination tyrannizes over conviction. Therefore each weekly confession should be our Chapter of Faults committed against the Rule of Life.

CHAPTER VIII

Hearing Confessions

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." —(*Matt. v, 7*).

ONE cannot go far in any week of his ministry without feeling some stern reminder of this world's last day—that day of judgment and justice. Against that day I place the many days of mercy I spent in absolving and saving sinners, countless hours, uncomfortable to me, delightful as heaven to my penitents.

Any one who represents Christ as judge in a tribunal of Mercy must not even *seem* alien to Him as a Christian. An undiscriminating impartiality among penitents is the right mind. "To the wise and the unwise I am a debtor" (Rom. i, 14). If any preference is shown it should be for those most in need of pardon, namely the most abominable sinners; and, if one could but know them, the most hardened; and surely the most bashful. Then the poverty-stricken, the mothers of laborers' families, negro servants, dull toilers in mills, wayward boys, silly young girls, dirty people, foul smelling, ignorant, stupid, ill-mannered people. O Jesus my Savior! How deeply dost Thou love a father confessor who constantly prefers penitents of these classes.

And now think of the confessor's human reward, namely the gratitude of his penitents. No trait of love is so touching as the revealing a shameful secret to one whom we venerate as Christ's representative. Show me

that love and you win me. Father Hecker once told me that he overflowed with consolation whilst hearing confessions on Catholic missions, saying to himself, "This poor man must trust me as he would an angel—to tell me such awful things." St. Phillip Neri was often ill during the later years of his life, and yet continued to hear men's confessions from his sick bed. When physicians protested, he said that hearing confessions was a recreation to him. O God what a grace! An old man values and enjoys quiet leisures and cheerful company. But here is an old priest who is refreshed by the doleful tales and the bitter tears of men's confessions, refreshed as boys are with playing. How deeply he loved souls! How vivid was the saint's appreciation of the Sacrament of Penance.

Venerable Father Peter Pinamonti, for many years associated with Venerable Paul Segneri—both Jesuits—in missions to Catholics, gave the short instructions and heard nearly all the confessions, Father Paul being very hard of hearing. When Father Peter came to his last hour a man craved him to hear his confession. Pinamonti had been enthusiastically devoted to that sacrament. His joy was extreme when this request was made him. In granting it he made use with minute care of every word and motion prescribed by the sacred rubrics. The last words he uttered on earth were those of the absolution, which he spoke inflamed with joy. (See his Life and that of Segneri in the Oratorian Series).

To say of a Father Confessor, he receives penitents kindly is good praise. But our Savior says: "The Good Shepherd giveth His life for His sheep;" it is not said even that He seeks out His strayed sheep, but that when

He hath found it "He layeth it on His shoulder and bringeth it home to the fold" (John x).

Many is the man who says at his happy death "since so many years ago, when I made that confession to Father So-and-so, I have not committed a single grievous sin." How divine a thing is this: The double dyed guilt of the sinner and the pity, and absolution of the Father Confessor are herein cause and effect. It is what *must* be said of the guilt of every sinner and the pity of the Crucified Savior. How rightly named is this Sacrament, the *Sacrament of the most Precious Blood.*

How did the prodigal's father receive him? He went to meet him on the road. The true father confessor is a true father. He meets his penitent halfway. The priest who causes confession to become a regular practice among the men of a congregation—O how Christ loves such a pastor! How easily does such a pastor make his people the sweet odor of Christ to non-Catholics.

It is right to say that one should be eager to hear confessions, since the salvation of the souls of our neighbors depends on it. But when St. John Baptist de Rossi was cautioned against hurting his health by hearing so many confessions, he answered: "Do not disturb me in this work, for my eternal salvation depends on my doing it." Being once hindered from going to his confessional, he exclaimed: "I am stopped on the way to heaven." This is true not only of saints but of ordinary priests; whatsoever is of extreme necessity to a parishioner of mine must be done by me under the direst penalties.

Here are some gentle admonitions; take it for granted that you will have to do something of the penitent's part as well as your own; he may have only a miserable little

spark of intelligence, easily befogged, or a faint spark of sorrow easily extinguished if it be only breathed upon and inflamed. If a penitent is worth absolving he is worth advising—none, be he saint or sinner, should be dismissed without some words of advice; advice from a priest is gold, from a priest in confession it is gold from the mint of the Holy Ghost. Try this test: Will my penitent like to return to me? I should think of his next confession always; a village store keeper does not sell a yard of calico without hoping to win a steady customer by generous dealing and kindly manners. If I find a penitent not rightly disposed for the sacrament, I am annoyed; what if he finds me not rightly disposed to administer it? He may validly receive it but with little profit; and I may validly administer it but with little merit, inspiring no confidence, giving no instruction, exhortation or encouragement; I exhibit no interest, show no sympathy, show timidity and hesitation; am hurried, sarcastic. A pitiless father confessor is a glaring incongruity.

It is a most direct application of grace, being an immediate revelation of the subject's evil state. Divine mercy touches with your hands, looks with your eyes upon the diseased soul. One gives communion blindfolded —not so absolution. How bright should be the intelligence and how affectionate the heart of a confessor. The application of the divine remedy is blended with and accompanied by the human ministration—inseparably and intimately. It is by far the most human of the sacraments. Human ministration is herein raised to its holiest office. Human friendship is elevated into sacramental holiness.

A man may say Mass "fairly and devoutly well" and be only an innocent good priest, or a penitent good priest.

Not so if he hear confessions even "fairly well." The grace *ex opere operantis* is here more in play than in Mass itself. "He says Mass with recollection." "He is an admirable confessor." How very much higher a praise is the latter than the former. The influence of soul upon soul is herein raised to its highest and holiest—persuasion, example, correction—and all made sacramental, divine—no other sacrament does this. It is entirely personal and entirely representative. One might say of this Sacrament, if its minister is devout and capable, "All good things came to me together with her" (Wisd. vii, 11).

Compare hearing confessions with preaching. Confession is like the summons of death: "I will see thee alone." It is every way personal; both the graces and their imparting is a concentration of them all upon an individual soul—separate and alone; not diffused (and thereby subdivided) among many as in preaching. A Christian may forget parts of a sermon—may easily do so, but a penitent *cannot* forget a syllable of a confessor's admonition. One may go to sleep during a sermon; never in making his confession, or listening to his father confessor. The confessor may doze off, the penitent, never.

The joy of going to confession is hardly so refined as that of receiving communion, but in case of hard sinners it is a joy original, sudden, electric; vividly contrasted with the hideous gloom of guilt which it supplants. Literally it is like Our Lord's promise: "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy" (John xvi, 20).

What God will not do, what the Church cannot do, that does my Father Confessor; he gives me the confidential discussion of my misery, and the personal appli-

cation of the blood and grace and merits of Christ. In the old law prophets alone did this, Elias, Nathan Jeremias. In the new law, our Redeemer—and after Him the ministers of this sacrament. The parish clergy have their first novitiate in the Seminary—their second is the better one—in the confessional. It begins soon after ordination, and ends only at death. The Asceticism of the Confessional? The confessional is the assemblage of every self-denial; of every stimulant to prayer. It is a storehouse of meditation, a panorama of good example. Here fraternal love is most deliberate and at its highest activity; on the one hand a really divine compassion, and on the other perfect gratitude. The love of Jesus Christ flows like a river upon, into and through every faculty of mind and sense of body: mutually enjoyed by both priest and penitent.

I have read much of novitiates and heard much. But I never heard of a monk's novitiate requiring each and every novice to be shut up in a 3 x 4 box; to sit there in a cramped position; stooped now to the left and then to the right; always whispering or listening to the whispers of all kinds of men, women and children; whispering about the deep things of God and the black things of devils. Three hours before supper and three and a half hours after supper one day every week—some weeks two days; year in and year out. Bad odors; in a cold church, or in suffocating heat; often fasting; after driving several miles; suffering from a bad cold, indigestion, or rheumatism. The Holy See would not approve such a novitiate for a most austere order, for a single year; yet it is ours for life. Compare it with hair shirts, disciplines, fastings, chains, and these are nothing to it.

The confessor is everybody's servant to command. Iron fidelity to the rule of the parish is a necessity. The people may be forgetful, but the priest who refuses to go to the confessional at any time, puts a hair shirt on his conscience, except in a very rare case. Watch the church door, while walking the aisle and reading God's praises in the Breviary; see:—a little miss trips in and enters the confessional; the Divine Office is stopped, and you go and listen to her prattle.

Here is a running comment on St. Paul's famous praise of holy Charity (1 Cor. xiii).

"If I should have all knowledge" of moral theology and have not charity, viz. a love for sinners, *"I am nothing"* in the confessional—rather I am a minus quantity.

If *"I have faith* to remove mountains" and lack charity for the fallen, *"I am nothing"* in the confessional.

If I *"give all my goods to the poor"*—why, I give men rich or poor heaven itself if I am a good confessor.

The good confessor "is *patient, is kind.*"

He *"envieth not"* the orator's gifts.

He *"dealeth not perversely"* by obstinacy of opinion or ill-temper.

He *"is not puffed up"* with conceit of his own virtues.

He is not unmindful of his own general confession; O how great a school of humility is the confessional.

He *"is not ambitious"* of giving high spiritual direction —but rather to absolve sinners, and help them lay the foundation of a new and blameless life.

He *"seeketh not his own" comfort* in place or in time, but rather the will of all and of every one.

He *"is not provoked to anger"*—but rather to tears of sympathy.

He *"thinketh no evil,"* especially of other confessors.

He *"rejoiceth not in iniquity,"* yet is more glad of a bad lot of penitents than of a good lot.

He *"beareth all things"* whether uncomfortable or convenient, late or early—for God and sinners.

He *"believeth and hopeth all things"* good, of the future of a sinner, if he be truly sorrowful.

"And now there remain" in my confessional "faith, hope, *charity, these three, and the greatest of these is charity;"* the triumph and perfection of priestly charity is in the confessional.

CHAPTER IX

Sick Calls

THE main question about every man, be he saint or sinner, be he supreme pontiff or simplest layman, the one decisive question is universally and eternally the same: What shall be his soul's state when he dies? As I speak that question my reader's mind sees the priest approaching a deathbed. Therefore whatsoever gift is bestowed by Holy Church on her children from first to last, death claims one as its exclusive prerogative: that of the Last Anointing; and it likewise appropriates a Eucharistic prerogative with name and graces all its own, namely, the deathbed communion, the Viaticum. Every other sacrament may then be given and received: baptism even by desire is efficacious with one's last sigh; confirmation is its echo as truly amid the mists of death as in life's early years; penance may be abridged by the intensest concentration; levites far gone in consumption are not seldom ordained priests, passing from the death chamber to the church to offer Mass once—and then to return to die; and who does not know that a marriage neglected during a life time is validated by the dying breath of one of the parties: how sacred a solemnization!

Thus it is that our Redeemer's vocation of his priests makes them all capable—and in very many cases they are distinctly destined—for imparting the farewell kiss of His Church, bidding Godspeed at the threshold of eternity. How superabundant is the meaning of our great High

Priest: "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and appointed you that you should go and should bring forth fruit; and your fruit should remain" (John xv, 16).

Now, it is meet that the priest should be the captain of a little army of helpers in the arena of death's many conflicts. For Christ's priest should not be left single-handed in his struggle with the dying man's appalling depression of spirits, and the cunning wiles of demons. Too often the Christian dies amid squalid surroundings, with unskilful care for his ailments, perhaps none at all; tortured to the last by anxieties about family matters, while every energy is prostrated by the awful dread of death. And the priest is the almoner of the most generous of all classes, his Catholic people. But he is multiplied and extended in his every influence (except what is purely sacramental) by every man and woman who will be with him in his ministrations; and this applies as well to those who hearken to the pitiful inspirations of the Holy Ghost in their secret hearts, or who are members of such societies as the parish St. Vincent de Paul Conference. Every Catholic hospital is, of course, an organized force of trained Good Samaritans to soothe the woes of the dying. He who is the altar boy (as it were) of a priest in the death chamber is favored with an angelic privilege. This place may be claimed by a member of the family, but this is seldom the case among the poor, or when death is due to accident. Nothing that a layman can do at a deathbed should be left to a priest to do, and this covers many precious things of an intensely religious nature, close to the sacraments of confession, communion and Extreme Unction; including all the responses in the sacred liturgy. In Catholic countries it was once a uni-

versal custom for members of a certain devout society organized to accompany the priest carrying the blessed sacrament to a sick person, to furnish him torch-bearers on his way, and to serve him at the bedside. Shall we not bring back this essentially Christian custom?

Many years ago when I was a young layman, an unexpected death cast a family of my close acquaintance into the most agonizing misery. I was present; and I can never forget the priest's words uttered with unearthly solemnity: "May the will of God be done!" O what sweet peace and submission those heavenly words bestowed on that stricken family.

St. Francis of Assisi once met a beggar almost naked, and fainting with hunger. He said to his companion with plain marks of sadness: "That poor man's condition is a reproach to us," and forthwith he helped him. To the saints the sight of a sick person is like the memory of an unpaid debt.

The foremost friend of the sick is indeed the priest. He brings into the sick room, amid light and joy, Him who is the sufferer's physician and medicine both. He is the oracle of that Faith whose prayer "shall save the sick man" (James v, 15); and he is the co-worker of Him whose benediction cleanses the saddened spirit of the leprosy of sin.

The whole mission of a priest is summed up in Our Lord's original calling when he sent forth His disciples: "And He sent them two and two, to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick" (Luke x). How near is the body to the soul in the eyes of Jesus. How near to saving souls is saving bodily health, the hospital to the church and school, the sick room to the sanctuary. Hence

in that day which is the whole world's weal or woe, the Judge thanks His elect for bodily works of mercy thus: "I was sick, and you visited Me" (Matt. xxv, 36).

St. John of God, who founded an Order for the care of the sick, said this: "There is only one thing on earth that can distract my mind from thinking of God, and that is the sight of the sick poor."

It is but changing one's glances from the figure of Christ on the cross to its mirrored plaintiveness upon the sick bed. Many a one is given the grace to take Christ's words spoken in His prophecy of the judgment with ardent realism: "Amen, I say to you, as often as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it unto Me" (Matt. xxv, 40). Hence we find in the original rule of the Venerable Louise Le Gras for her Sisters of Charity—in the same spirit as St. John of God's saying already quoted—"The Sister sitting up with a patient shall make her prayer beside the sick, remembering (as well as the one who takes her place) that all the care they bestow on the sick is a continual prayer before God. They shall always consider the sick as their lords and masters, since Our Lord is in them" (Life, ch. viii). The short road to higher grades of prayer is the stairway to the sick room.

A little self sacrifice on my part (O how little!) brings abundant joy to the heart of a sick man and to his family. A kind hand makes bitter medicine sweet; a kind word of inquiry unburdens the sick man's mind of his woes—the topic he loves best is his pains and miseries. One's presence at the bedside is especially an opportunity to talk of eternal things to him who may be within hand's reach of death. My visit and my words may be a sweet har-

mony to the last sacraments. St. Philip Neri tells us that as he was once atending a hospital in Rome, he saw two members of St. Camillus' Order praying at the bedside of a dying patient, and he beheld an angel close beside them giving them words to speak to the poor sufferer.

A well man may wander free amid the allurements of life. But when he is sick he is God's prisoner; the divine messenger finds a fettered and usually docile subject. He who is grateful to you for a mere word of sympathy will yield wholly to you when you promise him the joys of paradise. "I met with trouble and sorrow," says the Psalmist, "and I called upon the name of the Lord" (Ps. cxiv, 34). The Lord answers by sending His priest. You may say that there are exceptions to this rule, that illness only hardens some sinners. I cannot deny it. But a spirit so hard as to resist the affectionate and continued care of a priest, a friend, disinterested, deeply religious, always soothing bodily pain, incapable of taking offence —such a case is almost unheard of. It often happens here that the seed of the eternal harvest is sown and the fruit gathered the same month—even the same day. How often are first communion and Viaticum administered at one and the same time to a hoary old penitent on his deathbed—a tearful welcome to that patient God after it had seemed for years that all hopes were gone.

Of all the help that I can do to my neighbor, what can compare with helping him to die a happy death? What evil can compare with a bad death? O I would wish to put on a dying man's lips the last word he will speak on earth. His dying prayer! O Lord, let me choose its words; let me inspire his last glimmer of consciousness with confidence in his Judge. Let me feel the pressure

of his stiffening hand in thanks for the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph which I whisper into his ear as it grows dull in death. Most sweet is the feeling of victory if one is helping a dying sinner at the end of a life of turbulent passion. I would covet above crowns and sceptres the privilege to say his last words of earth, ringing with holy hope, immediately to be exchanged for the first words of eternal peace, heard from the lips of Jesus Christ.

The ideal condition for a good work is a spontaneous eagerness for it. This is born of a living interest; as bankers lend money on safe security, as soldiers attack a wavering enemy, so should we feel when we hear of a serious illness in our parish. When word came to our Savior of the illness of His friend Lazarus, instantly he forecast a mighty miracle in his favor. "He whom thou lovest is sick," they said; and He decided to heal him—not from bodily illness, but from the stroke of death itself (John xl, 3). A priest patterning on Him, is ready to wash dishes or run errands to the drug store, as well as to administer the last rites. The priest puts himself in spirit in that room, on that bed with its soiled linen, in that hot room with its foul odors—day and night. O those long nights! O those racking pains, the gloomy mind, the broken nerves, the quaking heart, the dark forebodings, the stinging, burning recollections of years of sin. And now, O blessed gift! Here comes one who tells me how to face my injured God, *how to die happily.* All my misgivings fly away as if they were unclean things going back to the deep pit. He sits up with me all night or sends some kind soul to sit up with me and let my worn-out wife get a little rest. He reads to me lovely

things and delightful prayers. He laughs sometimes, so gently and kindly; and he is not too proud to shed tears with my little babies—a sweet hearted friend to be sure, and one whom I will not forget if ever I go to heaven.

Centuries ago it was said of St. Anastasius of Antioch that "He had an extraordinary talent in comforting the afflicted." A man of talents, such as a talented professor, shines among his fellows. O for a talented consoler of the afflicted, or a brilliant converter of non-Catholics. O God, grant me ten thousand talents of love to be spent on the sick, and on this world-weary and sin-tainted race that Thou hast so much loved. A talent for consoling agonizing hearts!

The rubrics of Sick Calls are exceedingly edifying, and, of course should be observed scrupulously. As the priest enters the room he sprinkles it and its inmates with holy water, a little bottle of which he brings with him: having said the words, *Pax huic domui* and *omnibus habitantibus in ea*—and then he translates it, he goes to the sufferer's bedside and he greets him affectionately; placing to his lips his crucifix, he puts it in his hands. Then placing his stole about his shoulders he enshrines the Blessed Sacrament upon the table near the lighted candle, humbly genuflecting, and inviting the bystanders to kneel. Confession follows, the attendants going into the next apartment. The priest will recite the penance, always a short one, with the sufferer. Now calling in the family he administers communion; he asks all present to recite together the Confiteor in English whilst he does so in Latin. He carefully provides the patient with a spoonful of water. The prayers before and after the Last Anoint-

ing are exceedingly edifying, and some part of them he should translate, addressing the sick person with many words of ardent hope. How readily is all this done when the priest realizes why he is what he is, and why he is where he is—to make sure of a soul's salvation at the point of death—a bounden duty to be sure, but an unspeakable boon to himself, a brotherly act of the divinest kind. Our Lord besides doing "all things well" (Mark vii, 37), "healing all manner of diseases" (Matt. iv, 23), He spoke "as one having power" (Luke iv, 32). These are also points of excellence in a priest's ministrations, not excepting (in cases not a few) a miracle of healing by the Last Anointing.

Never forget that no man in your parish is so pitiful in the eyes of your Redeemer as a sinner stricken with his last illness. The Savior strains even the ears of infinite mercy to catch the first whisper of contrition, recalling His response to the penitent thief on Calvary. You are helping our all loving Savior in gratifying His dearest wish. Fénelon says: "It were a horrible presumption to count upon miracles of grace, but if Jesus forbids us to presume upon them, He sometimes is pleased to perform them." His favorite miracles are wrought through his priests on sick calls.

The reactive effect of ministering to the sick is among the most precious graces of the priesthood. A devoted zeal for this divine function permeates one's whole body, soul, character with the sweetness of Calvary. Thomas à Kempis, quoting from Ecclesiasticus (vii, 40), says, "Blessed is he who always has the hour of death before his eyes" (*Imitation* i, 23).

Much is said about defective education; but what

schooling worthy the name has any mortal got, who never has seen a man die? Of the sermons of many a spiritual retreat the masterpiece is that upon death, and its perfection is so to paint the scenes and circumstances, yea to recall the very feelings of the death chamber, so as to reproduce the sentiments of the bereaved family. But what sermon preached in a great crowded room before the peaceful altar, can equal in effect seeing the awful event itself, partaking as a priest in the final conflict with human misery, and delusions and deceptions marshalled and managed and insinuated by Satan on the one side, all baffled and foiled by Christ and his Mother and St. Joseph and the guardian angel and the priest of God on the other. Ask any priest or hospital Sister whether any annual retreat preached by the the most eloquent master of holy persuasion, can equal the force of the lessons of death taught by the stern reality of the prodigious event itself. Yet this finishing touch, this final and complete summary of all education is by some positively dreaded and ingeniously avoided.

The death chamber is my university. Its remembrances are my diploma. The uttermost wisdom that Christ can teach me is that of His gibbet: "I judged not myself to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. ii, 2). The meaning of Christ's death to me is the sum total of His religion. The meaning of my neighbor's death to me is the sum total of my priestly love. To avoid the sights and sounds and odors of death is to play truant from religion's kindergarten; and also to ignore the maturest wisdom of Him who said: "Learn of Me" (Matt. xi, 29). St. Paul, again, adorned and arrayed himself in the very marks of his Master's

death: "From henceforth let no man be troublesome to me: for I bear the marks of the (death of) the Lord Jesus in my body" (Gal. vi, 17)—the apostle bore the Lord's wounds actually in his body, as many think, even though invisible to all but himself, as was the case with St. Catherine of Siena. But all priests are Christ's wound-bearers. Blessed are those noble ones who by frequenting death chambers are stamped in their very souls with tearful affection and with heart-broken pity for their fellowmen. Even the heathen sage felt glad to boast that not the lowest specimen of human nature but was kindred to him. *"Nihil enim humanum alienum puto:* There is nothing mortal that I rate as alien to me." Death is the divine leveler to all thoughtful men; and to priests of the Crucified it levels up as well as down. Shall I shrink from its best study, experimental study?

"Taste and see that the Lord is sweet" (Ps. xxxiii, 9). Now what is my sweetest food—what but the Blessed Eucharist, of which St. Paul says: "For as often as you shall eat this bread and drink the chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord until He come" (1 Cor. xi, 26). It is that daily communicant, the priest, who knows most of Christ, wounded and dying with Him every day. A daily visit to a sick-room is like a sacramental union of brotherly love with one's fellowman. Blessed is such a daily communion.

Everybody has heard about St. Francis of Assisi receiving in his body of flesh the actual wounds of Christ crucified, which he had received in his spirit many years before. After this bodily impression of them, if one should clasp hands with the saint he would grasp the wound with the nail; if the saint embraced you it would

be to press you to his bosom opened by the soldier's spear; it was every way an intimate union with Christ given to one of His closest favorites. What else (though in no miraculous manner) is one's feeling of intimacy with our dying Redeemer through the loving service of His brethren in their last hours. Does He not in so many words proclaim it in His prophecy of the Last Judgment? "Come ye blessed of my Father, possess ye the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. . .I was sick, and you visited Me. . . .Then shall the just answer Him: . . .When did we see Thee sick and came to Thee? And the King answering, shall say: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt. xxv, 40).

Let us who are lovers of Christ and His human race honor death and serve death's victim's in their parting moments. His love of the dying entrusts love's most precious tokens to the readiest and swiftest messengers of our heart's affection. To the Crucified death betokens love, as no other token can; death is love's wedding ring. Death proves love, for hear this reproach of the apostle to His followers: "For you have not yet resisted unto blood" (Heb. xii, 11); and our Savior insists: "Greater love than this can no man have than that he should lay down his life for his friends" (John xiv, 13). By frequenting deathbeds I guide dying Christians into the dying heart of Jesus, but I gradually assimilate to myself the supreme act of religion, which is there and not elsewhere entirely consummated. Life's fruit ripens as the leaves decay; whilst the body becomes more nearly dust the spirit acquires more perfectly its maturity of spiritual

growth. The Bridegroom measures the perfect strength of the love of His spouse thus: "Strong as death is love" (Cant. viii, 6).

All of life's scenes are but rehearsal for the closing scene in our earthly drama—enacted in the death chamber. The diploma of life is bestowed only at death. The man who goes to school then and there, is alone fitted for graduation—a diligent pupil is one who never will miss a lesson.

À Kempis' piercing question: "Hast thou ever seen a man die?" may be, and in a multitude of cases must be, answered on sick calls, which are God's school of fundamental religion.

Sick calls are considered by some as the most irksome of our duties. Words such as these are heard: "If you take my Sick Calls I will take your sermon." How ignoble! Here is the great crisis—not life but life eternal is in the balance. An impenitent sinner is presently to be ushered before his divine Judge. A patient, loving mother has failed to move him to reform his life, a tender long-suffering wife, yea, even his little children have failed. Now there falls upon him the dire penalty of death. Against that fateful peril Jesus Christ has appointed a mighty help, none less than His *Alter Ego, his priest*. Preaching is good, who has not proved it. But when we preach best "We preach Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. i, 23). And now I must go to a dying sinner and *practice* Christ and Him Crucified, there to bestow on a parting soul the Crucified to be his companion across the awful borderland; I am to anoint him with Christ's blood, washing away his sins. Once I heard a priest telling with joy of building a tiny hospital in his

little town. Well might he be glad who gladdens the eternal years of dying sinners.

"He has no zeal for the sick;" and "sick calls are irksome to him." A sign of tepidity, and how plain a sign. Yet one may experience a certain unwillingness and conquer it, purity of intention, fidelity to conscience winning the struggle. For a while one may not feel much consolation, but only for a while; a positive sanctification is sure to result. For the priest has imparted resignation to God's will in a man's last moments; the dying mother leaving her children wholly to God's (and the priest's) care; in due time the priest witnesses miraculous bodily curses, for "the prayer of faith shall save the sick man" (James v, 15).

What priest can say that he knows his people except he becomes familiar with their troubles, above all in their illness and death. The very moment a hardened sinner falls sick his pastor, called or not called, should visit him. He may avoid you in health, but in illness he is your prisoner. If the illness is not serious, it may be good policy to say little about religion; he will be glad of that and entertain you with talk about his pains; and this may be the case for several visits. But the victory is certain—if he recovers you are on a familiar footing with him. You have won the outwork of his citadel. If he grows worse your visits soon grow intensely suggestive to him, and your opportunity will presently appear. How many obdurate spirits are thus changed and softened—and saved eternally. Before illness scoffing, defiant; as weakness increases and the priest's visit is regular and kindly, the poor soul is won totally for God.

Prompt to attend; ignoring the tardiness of relatives

in sending word, annoyed at nothing, patient, cheerful whatever may happen, called once never needing to be called again, making sure of being present at the near approach of death, again each day until the funeral, and calling afterwards upon the bereaved family. How easy it all is. Who can fail in this duty—thank God it is the most critical of our obligations. And so easy. I may fail in a sermon but never in a visit to the sick.

The Good Samaritan stations in each little neighborhood of all Christendom a superior kind of Christian, one whose most sacred duty is to visit sick persons. In what spirit? "He whom thou lovest is sick" (John xi, 3). Such is the right meaning of a message for a Sick Call. A *call* indeed: a call for help; uttered from the midst of Satanic enemies; uttered in agonized tones by one's brother in Christ Crucified; in the name of God come and help me; I am perishing eternally; you can save me by only speaking words and touching my lips and eyes and hands and feet; save me from eternal death; I am at enmity with my own brother; I am loaded with sins against my own mother; when I think of God I am in despair; you alone can save me. Come, for the love of Christ Crucified come to my help.

In every family in your parish its entire history is marked by this division: before or after some great death —a father's, a mother's, an only child's. And every Sick Call is your call to be present at this dire event; a call co-ordinate with your vocation to God's altar.

My last word is to remind you that your opporunity to visit sick non-Catholics is also a divine Calling. How? If you hear of severe illness in any family in your parish limits, remember the parable of the Good Samaritan, and

ask yourself that portentous question, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke x, 29.) He is any sick person whatsoever, Catholic or Protestant, Jew or Gentile. Ring the door bell and say, "I am told you have severe illness in your family; I am the Catholic priest; here is my card; be assured of my sympathy and of my prayers." Surely, that leads to conversions, and it is no more than your merest neighborly duty; yea it is much more: it is in straight line with your priestly vocation.

CHAPTER X

Preaching

The Making of the Preacher

I COPY from St. Francis de Sales (Love of God, Bk. xii, ch. vi) the following rules of Christian oratory: "Condescension to the humors of others, bearing with the clownish and irritating actions and ways of our neighbor; conquering our own humors and passions; renouncing our personal inclinations; resisting our aversions and repugnances; heartfelt and gentle self avowal of our own imperfections; at continual pains to keep our souls in a state of equanimity; love of our own abjection; giving a gracious welcome to the contempt and censure of our condition, state, way of life, conversation, actions: all these under the guidance of heavenly love." These are all rules of the asceticism of sacred oratory.

When is my special time of preaching? The penitential season of Lent: therefore a rigid observance of the penances prescribed by Holy Church, especially fasting and abstinence well becomes me. I fast because I am a sinner and must do penance; because I am a Christian and must obey the Church; because I am a preacher. "O God who by a bodily fast, restrainest vices, *upliftest our minds,* and grantest strength and rewards" (from the Preface of holy Mass during Lent). Being mentally elevated by religious fasting we command attention with a gentle sway. Divine inspiration is not granted to a gross feeder,

nor does heavenly fervor follow dining and wining. Neither patience in preparing sermons nor sincerity in preaching them is granted to a priest who evades the lenten fast by over benignant self-dispensation.

Give me a priest of solid virtue and kindly manners, and I will show you in an effective preacher.

On one side:

To enlighten, to console, to edify, to save.

On the other:

To rule, to correct, to reprove.

Both right, both needed for an integral pastorate; who would suppose that their blending is very much a question of personal demeanor and manners, choice of language, and of times and occasions and methods. His manner in the pulpit is a valuable asset in a priest's preaching. No man who lives consciously in the sight of God need be much troubled about his manners; a true pastor is the anxious steward of the good things of God for His children; a kind heart easily finds the right style of address for distributing them.

That a preacher ought to be a man of spiritual reading and meditation needs no proof. In the appointment of the Deacons the apostles said: "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word" (Act vi, 4). Highly incongruous is an indevout man expounding the Gospel of the Crucified. Zeal, unction, affectionateness, holy dignity—how will you get these traits except by solid piety.

If there be such a thing as the grace of zeal, so there is that of elevating a hearer's soul above his own nature to the nature of God by love. "To one, indeed, by the Spirit, is given the word of wisdom: to another the word

of knowledge, according to the same Spirit" (1 Cor. xii, 8). By what spirit, then do we impart wisdom and knowledge to men? The self denying spirit, the spirit lusting against the flesh by self denial and partaking of that Spirit whose fruit is charity and joy (Gal. v, 22).

Compare the Sermon on the Mount preached word for word by an earthly monarch from a throne glittering with gold and jewels, surrounded by a brilliant court; and the same spoken on the open hillside by the poor Man of Nazareth without home or money, amid fishermen and peasants. Our theme is the same as His. Let us never forget the ever blessed poverty and submissiveness and chastity and meekness and patience of Jesus Christ. The preparation of our heart can only be prayer and penance. We are to persuade men that God's honor is pledged to these astounding propositions (Matt. v, 3-11). It is a happier lot to be poor rather than to be rich; to give rather than to receive; a happier state is mourning than any earthly joy; a nobler conquest is surrendering to an enemy than overcoming him; yielding our rights to others is better joy than maintaining them. What! Teach these things clothed in soft garments and feasting sumptously every day!

It is sad to see a man of good mind wholly unlettered; but to be a man of good mental gifts, and a member of the most intellectually trained class in the world—the class of divinely appointed teachers of mankind—and at the same time a downright failure as an instructor—this is appalling. The reasons are low views about sacerdotal perfection; indolence about meditation and spiritual reading; self indulgence at table; and in one's whole manner of life addicted to excessive relaxation. In one word,

lack of spirit, principle, and practice of the gospel of the Crucified.

One cannot conceive a nobler charity than that which devotes the most precious of goods to the benefit of the largest number; teaching the sweetest happiness—to vast numbers with simply no compensation, simply none, except one in kind, namely gratitude, given spontaneously and for the same motive—God. St. John of the Cross (Vol. ii, p. 189, quoting from Ps. xviii, 10, 12) says: "The judgments of the Lord are true, justified in themselves, to be desired above gold and many precious stones, and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. For Thy servant keepeth them. The soul longs to be profoundly absorbed in God's judgments, and to have a deeper knowledge of them, and for that end would esteem it a joy and consolation to endure all sufferings and afflictions of the world, and whatever might conduce to that end, however hard and painful it might be; it would gladly pass through the agonies of death to enter deeper into God."

This charity of preaching is a very special one, because 1st—Every teaching of *that kind* deepens the teacher's own knowledge, and makes him more expert in persuading; 2nd—Indefinitely adds to his own enjoyment both in the matter taught and in the gratitude of his hearers. He thus gives more than he has, and obtains more than he bargained for. On the contrary: an indevout teacher may help his hearers, but dwelling in himself he does not go deep into his theme; he does not help himself—but hurts himself by vain glory; soon he tires of both doctrine and teaching—very soon. Or he helps his hearers, purely at his own expense; they love his doctrine? Yes, but in

spite of him, for *he* does not communicate love. The devout listener skips over such a teacher in arriving at the doctrine; the doctrine is something essentially distinct from him. The sermon is of more worth than the preacher; the preacher should do as much good as the sermon. A poorer teacher and less learned teaches better; because he edifies as well as teaches.

The unspiritual preacher does not wear well; his congregation find him out; his "eloquence" palls on them. Learned? fine doctrine? Yes: a Damascus blade with a rickety hilt. So emphatic is St. Paul on this head that he calls the right way "the foolishness of preaching" (1 Cor. i, 21); "foolish" to a worldling, the "power of God" to an unhappy sinner; "the wisdom of God to them that are saved." Where, then, is the room for elegant literature in writing, powerful oratory in preaching? But look at Dante, Faber, Newman, Fénelon. The only question in the relation of the art of expression to divine wisdom is this: which is master, which is servant? But meanwhile, without art a simple man may be a strong teacher: with art no learned and profane mind can teach well. Would that every one's zeal for souls were equal to his art.

The Making of the Sermon

Be it understood that I am not now considering instructions properly so-called, doctrinal or moral, but rather the parish sermon preached at the principal Mass; and also sermons, whether doctrinal or moral, preached in course, on Sundays or on week-day evenings during Lent or Advent. The first continue from twenty-five minutes, the second from forty-five to sixty.

Now I am supposing the priest to possess a fair share of the pastoral virtues which I have been considering thus far. Being therefore himself a living sermon by his good repute among his people, and by the tone and atmosphere of his presence in the pulpit, the getting together and rightly assembling the materials of his message is not a difficult task. He is a grave character. He is by training and by choice a studious man, fond of serious books, the Bible above all others. He has a fair verbal memory. His topics for Sundays and festivals are fixed for him by the epistles and gospels of the liturgy; and for a lenten or advent course they are what are called the great eternal truths, such as are preached by missionaries or retreat-masters.

Let us consider the making of an average Sunday discourse. The pastor begins the preceding Monday by framing a summary or syllabus of his two or three points, with a short introduction and an equally short conclusion. Thoughts at once occur to his mind, and as they come they are roughly jotted down, awaiting some little interval for becoming mature enough to be written out.

Let me here suggest consultation with some priest friend. Call on one whom you know to be, a kindred spirit and sympathetic; better still, manage to have him come to your house, and then lay before him your scheme, talk it up from beginning to end, and make notes—always make notes. This done (and how easily the doing of it solidifies into habit), the rest is plain sailing.

One always keeps in view his purpose—not to have it said after the sermon: What a fine preacher he is; how excellent a memory he has; how learned he is. But rather this: How blessed a thing is true contrition; how

loving is Christ to sinners; how hateful and how perilous is vice; how happy is heaven.

The composition of the sermon is a mosaic of truths of the Catholic faith; these are enforced by appropriate texts of scriptures, whose divine words should shine here and there like gems in a coronet. Then come some references from Lives of the Saints. It has been said that "there is no other difference between the Lives of the Saints and the gospel than that between music set to notes and the same actually sung. Secular history may also furnish some useful illustrations. Quotations from the poets are also both useful and pleasing if appropriate—not intruded. Incidents from daily life, public and even domestic, from natural history (how often did Our Lord borrow beautiful lessons from such things) are always welcome to our hearers. Little home-made parables and figures of speech should be plentifully used.

And now behold: your two or three thousand words for your Sunday sermon are written down; or your forty-five hundred words for your lenten discourse; which latter may easily be made an oration; in the truest meaning of the term.

Learned by heart? Yes, almost word for word, if not indeed exactly so. St. Alphonsus Liguori had this dictum (a preacher as sweet as he was magnificant): "For the first ten years learn by heart; after that your skeleton will suffice; for your experience and *fidelity* in learning by heart will have made your extemporizing equal to your best written discourse.

Remarks and Suggestions

The Council of Trent makes preaching the "chief duty

of a bishop." All engaged in pastoral duty are embraced by this venerable utterance. Faith is necessary to salvation, and "Faith cometh by hearing" (Rom. x, 17). How are men saved? By the grace of God; by good works; by the sacraments; by innocence; by penance. Very true; but all these come to souls by hearing the word of God. The people want preaching and love it, they always want to hear one who "has anything to say," and O who has such things to say as we. The preacher loves preaching. Faith grows within him by his preaching; his good life becomes a perfect life by his preaching; a holy character is formed within him by his preaching—intellectual as well as apostolic. Preaching makes a studious pastor; for study, continuous study is essential to preaching. Once I heard of a pastor who was not a preacher (is not this a contradiction in terms?) upon whom a strange priest made a call—in his absence. The stranger asked the housekeeper, "Where is his library?" and she picked up a finely bound gilt edged book and said, "He has three more of them." It was his breviary. An impossible case? I wish I could agree with you.

How to deliver a sermon; or rather how not. No elocution; do not sing the sermon—and (perhaps) drone the high Mass. Never show anger. "For the anger of man worketh not the justice of God" (James i, 20). Indignation is not zeal. Never use a slang word—never. Never be humorous. Never forget you are speaking to Catholics whose lives are passed amid non-Catholics; why should you not induce them to bring non-Catholics to hear you? The faithful must learn from you how to become "the good odor of Christ" (2 Cor. ii, 15). "But my parish is a little slum congregation." Such

was often our Savior's congregation; He never tired of such auditory; who are you that you feel above them?

But I *cannot* preach? Why not say, *I* cannot hear confessions? or I cannot visit the sick? You can talk politics with power and fervor. You can (perhaps) run down the neighboring pastor (or your predecessor) as convincingly as a prosecuting attorney; dare I even say that you can turn your bishop's mitre inside out. In all such eloquence you are proficient because your heart is in it. And why can you not "preach the word" (2 Tim. iv, 2) —if you but put your heart into the preaching of it. And meanwhile and whether or not you are *bound by God to preach.*

Toilsomely to travel through a desert waste, glaring sand everywhere, mile after mile, day after day, tortured with a burning throat—this is a dreary lot indeed. But the culmination is to reach the long expected well, dug deep and bricked up—and then to find it dry, half filled with sand drift. Like such a well is a priest who "cannot" preach. Many a Catholic layman's whole life is such a journey among Protestants and worse, an arid waste of miserable doubt and error; and then to see his priest coming in and going out of the very sanctuary of divine faith and love, ever talking of money, never preaching—hardly ever a word of God's promises; a non-preaching preacher; a well without water. "O God, my God, to Thee do I watch at break of day. For Thee my soul hath thirsted; for Thee my flesh, O how many ways. In a desert land where there is no way and not water: *So in the sanctuary have I come before Thee*" (Ps. lxii, 2, 3). My priest is an anointed railer and scolder, a con-

secrated doctrinal mute; a resounding money questor; amid a thirsty people a dry well.

Per contra: "How sweet are thy words to my palate, more than honey to my mouth" (Ecclus. xxiv, 27). I once heard a man who had attended a course of sermons; he said of the priest: "Father, it was eating and drinking God's truth and love to listen to him." "Eat, O friends," invites the Holy Spirit, "and drink, and be inebriated my dearly beloved" (Canticles v, 1).

Never forget that preaching is not only the influence of *truth* upon souls, but it is also the influence of one *soul* upon many other souls; upon the influence of *a soul* upon other souls does the influence of *truth* upon them mainly depend.

This should hearten me, namely that homely maxim: "practice makes perfect;" it is never so true as in the divine vocation of preaching. In the spiritual life, say our masters, one is always a novice. But this by no means applies to preaching. Never say die! Stand fast by *duty,* and in God's good time success shall be achieved.

CHAPTER XI

The Priest's Fidelity in Little Things

Some Words of Scripture:

"Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God."—(Matt. v, 8.)

"Be still and see that I am God."—(Ps. xlv, 11.)

"My beloved to Me, and I to him."—(Canticles ii, 16.)

"One is My dove; My perfect one is but one; she is the only one of her mother, the chosen of her that bore her."—(Canticles vii, 8.)

"My eyes are ever towards the Lord."—(Ps. xxiv, 15.)

"If thine eye be single, thy whole body will be lightsome."—(Matt. vi, 22.)

"I will not give My glory to another."—(Isaias xlii, 8.)

"Amen, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you have seen signs; but because you have eaten of the loaves and have been filled."—(John vi, 26.)

"If the root be holy, so also shall the branches be."—(Rom. xi, 16.)

"No man can serve two masters."—(Matt. vi, 24.)

"The Lord hath made all things for Himself."—(Prov. xvi, 4.)

"Whatsoever you do, do it from the heart as to the Lord, and not to men."—(Col. iii, 23.)

"If I seek to please men, then am I no longer a servant of Christ."—(Gal. i, 10.)

THE PRIEST'S FIDELITY

WHEN shall we understand the worth of fidelity in little things? God be thanked—*He* is faithful to us in little things. If one is ailing, as he awakes after a good night's rest, the poor invalid exclaims: Thanks be to thee, O God, for a refreshing sleep. God was faithful in granting that little boon, a token of His granting him eternal rest. And so is He grateful to us as well for little services as for martyrdom itself. "We are not likely to be called on to shed our life's blood for God. But let us give it to Him drop by drop in each little duty" —a saying of the saintly Mother Mabel Digby of the Sacred Heart Nuns. Thus the apostle admonishes us: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do; do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. x, 31).

Each Christian and priestly soul has its own particular graces, and the degree of its perfection consists in its perfection in responding to them. This includes the inspirations of grace for things little as well as great. The extremes are fervor and lassitude of spirit. St. Ephrem says: "The devil is vanquished by the fervent; and then he says: I will go to my friends the slothful; among them I shall succeed without labor, and win victories without even stratagem." Meantime the consciousness that one is striving to do God's will in little things as well as in great is necessary to one's peace of mind, especially when they concern the priest's sacred functions. The reward of this painstaking spirit for an entirely perfect service is very great when it involves patience amid many little trials. "What is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly, an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. iv, 17).

St. Francis de Sales says: "There are a thousand

things which not to do is no sin, yet to do them is a great virtue; such as speaking softly, walking quietly, keeping our eyes cast down, passing the time of recreation well, and so on—little things, nevertheless most necessary for religious decorum and recollection" (Conferences viii). Among our various venial delinquencies which one must always be ready to correct and overcome—ever feel at war with—are late rising; hurry in morning and night prayers; constant self-indulgence at table; returning again and again into company which breeds idleness, waste of time, detraction, too much talk. All this blurs conscience, is wholly inconsistent with recollectedness, and is a steady drag on the observance of one's Rule of Life.

Cardinal Newman says: "It is a difficult and rare virtue to mean what we say, to love with discrimination, to think no evil, to bear no grudge, to be free from selfishness, to be innocent and straightforward; and when realized in due measure, one of the surest marks of Christ's elect."

Which of these sweet virtues grouped by the great oratorian as a forecast of predestination to eternal life, is, considered in itself, anything more than a virtue of merely guileless nature? They are the little things of a good-natured man; and yet Newman truly says they make up such a sum total of difficult and rare virtue as to forecast a happy death. Elsewhere he says that "Natural virtues are the natural branches on which spiritual fruit is grafted." Our Savior reproaches us that worldlings equal us in practicing them, for they are inborn traits of common friendship, whilst supernatural virtues are the fruits of paradise; as the distinction is made by Our Lord: "If you love them that love you, what thanks have

you? For sinners, also, love those that love them. And if you do good to them who do good to you what thanks have you? For sinners also do this. . .But love ye your enemies; do good and lend, hoping for nothing thereby; and your reward shall be great, and you shall be the sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the unthankful and the evil" (Luke vi, 32-35).

"A good tree does not bring forth evil fruit" (Matt. vii, 17), teaches Our Lord, that is to say, poisonous fruit; yet often enough a good tree bears some defective and worm eaten fruit. So, good souls never are guilty of mortal sin, yet sometimes of venial offenses, harsh, rough, ill-favored actions. Nothing is better known than the unpleasantness of certain good people's company. Now what are we to do? Our heart is good and our conduct is occasionally annoying to others; we are greedy, or sullen. What shall we do?—Realize this condition to begin with—and then we can with a little effort keep down the ugly growth; realize equally well that God alone, wholly alone, can kill the root of the bitterness. Let us look to Him for a radical cure and meantime constantly and sturdily exert ourselves for suppressing evil symptoms. Look to Him; that is to say maintain a steadfast and as it were a blind use of prayers and penances and examens, without wasting our patience looking for the times and the moments of God's radical change within us. According to Job's prayer: "Who can make him clean that is conceived of unclean seed? is it not Thou who only art?" (Job xiv, 4.)

Recalling St. Ephrem, be it borne in mind that the evil one is essentially the slave of man. Next to his eternal separation from God, the bitterest torment of

Satan is that he is under the feet of the Man Jesus. And the evil one is doomed to be conquered also by the mother of Jesus, of whom it was said after his first victory in the Garden of Eden: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head" (Gen. iii, 15).

Each man shares that royal mastery of Jesus and Mary over Satan, who, after all, is but a rebellious slave who can prevail only against a timid master. One learns only by sad experience that he may be made a toy of Satan; but this is if he trusts in himself. He also learns, oh how joyfully, that the supremest cunning of the devil and his awful strength are no match for the feeblest mortal who loves and trusts Jesus Christ and His saints and angels.

John Tauler thus answers the words—oftener thought than spoken—"This or that is only a venial sin:" "We shall the better understand venial sin if we consider what it is to stand against the infinite God even in the smallest matter" (1 Sermon for All Saints). We do not cease to be His friend; but we are content—deliberately and advisedly—no longer to be His intimate, trustful and confidential friend.

Bossuet wrote in his book, *The Diocesan Synod,* that any plain lack of sanctity in a priest is scandalous. And he exclaims: "For a priest not to be a saintly man is to be a scandal to his people." The present writer, after more than fifty years of closest acquaintance with our priests, affirms that this statement is absolutely true: *for a priest not to be a saintly man is to be a scandal to his people.*

How different is a saintly priest from one who must

drag himself to the confessional. How pitiful to see a highly educated priest given up to relaxations and newspapers and social visiting. What! is this the grand totality of the generous aspirations of boyhood, the blameless and happy time at college, the devout and studious years in the seminary!

In the soul of a priest free from downright mortal sin but addicted to venial sins, love for Jesus Christ may be present, but it is there like fire covered up with ashes. Such love gives out neither heat nor light and is gradually dying out (See *St. Francis de Sales, Love of God,* Bk. iv, ch. i).

"If you are at peace with venial sins," says Cardinal Newman, "be certain that in their company and in their shadow, mortal sins are lurking" (Sermons to Mixed Congregations: God's Will the End of Life). Consider the *habit* of venial sin, as distinguished from any particular fault; may not habitual and voluntary venial sinfulness—may this not be taken by itself, *itself* a mortal offense? Consider constantly recurring bad temper in the confessional; rooted neglect to prepare for preaching; year long dilatoriness in serving the sick; and in a congregation without a parish school, habitual minimizing attendance in the Sunday School. Put your finger on any particular act or omission as a grave sin:—impossible. But you may justly put your whole hand on the gravity of one or other of these *habitual* conditions.

The Jesuit Father Chaignon in his book of Sacerdotal Meditations addresses Our Lord as gazing upon a group of priests: "O Lord Jesus Christ! among these priests who are today Thy apostles, dost Thou single out one who will betray Thee?" A priest in mortal sin going to the

altar to offer Mass, or Benediction, or to carry communion to the sick, may aptly use the arrogant words of Pontius Pilate to our Redeemer: "Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and I have power to release Thee?" (John xix, 10.) And when such a priest is going to the altar to offer Mass, may not our Redeemer say to His Eucharistic angels: "He is at hand who will betray Me" (Matt. xxiv, 46).

What stands against love of souls? Scowling, race hatred, discord of tongues and bitterness of hearts, selfish greed, and Ecclesiastical ambition. Also the priest who is the thinker whose thoughts are for money and for power; the lover who loves bank accounts and fat places. The lover of souls and the thinker about souls is far different from these; and he is the true priest.

Something men call religion exists in a priest without virtue, but it is a religion of cant and pretense, or fanaticism and proscription of enemies. The priesthood is to him a caste; the church a religion of place and privilege—of conformities, and penalties, and observances.

Sometimes the main cause of moral degeneracy in a priest is money; and again it is human respect; mostly it is some form of sloth. Virtues are on the surface only; routine masquerades as regularity; conviviality parades as hospitality; low views of the divine priesthood are disguised as moderation of mind.

"Let us not be too strict" is a good enough rule in exercising authority, but in dealing with oneself it is better to be too strict than too easy. This latter trait it is that accounts for the veneration for a holy priest; nothing is so elevating, so touching, as the funeral of an edifying

priest, one who has run his course, fought his good fight and gained his crown (2 Tim. iv, 7). High views of the priesthood are at the root of all of our virtues. When St. Peter rebuked Our Lord for devoting Himself to a cruel death—surely no worse than an unbecoming act, a venial sin—yet his Master chided him with great severity: "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art a scandal unto me" (Matt. xvi, 22, 23).

Upon the high view of priestly virtue is founded the priest's Rule of Life, with its sacred schedule of daily meditation, daily spiritual reading, weekly confession, and the annual season of solitude and silence in retreat. This strictly observed, among other precious benefits smothers temptations to waste time. A great saint has said that the devil is glad to make us lose time when he cannot make us lose eternity. It is a mark of holiness when one says in confession, "I wasted time," specifying just how. Penuriousness in money matters is a foul vice; but God would have us all miserly of time. The Rule of Life is a time-saver. St. Francis de Sales was a staunch advocate of interior care. Yet he wrote to a Religious: "It is a great thing that exteriorly you are very observant of the Rule. God formed first the exterior of man, then 'He breathed into his face the breath of life;' [then this exterior man] became a living soul" (Gen. ii, 7).

The Rule of Life is the sentinel set to guard the precious little things of a priest's life. All know that to our littlest prayer there is a particular grace divinely responsive; but all do not know that each littlest good work of ours has its attendant grace. And on the other hand, alas, our littlest fault has its attendant penalty, administered with sternest justice. John Tauler in his

sermon for Easter Sunday says: "If thou wilt be made white, thou must wash off the littlest specs of black; the less black the more white." Two equally firm resolutions must be taken: one not to be disappointed at seeing weeds growing in our garden; the other to have the courage to pull them up: *always* these two resolutions. For the self-love which generates these little miseries will never die while we live.

The most efficacious means of fidelity in little things is the sacrament of confession. The grace received in this sacrament, established by Our Lord with great solemnity (John xx, 19-23), elevates motives of mere fear into those of love; and it is only thereby that pardon becomes real. But besides this—and indeed besides other high graces—the sacrament places in reach of every priest a shrine of spiritual counsel; there is always balm in this Galaad, always a physician there for aching hearts (Jer. xlvi, 11). Distress and misgivings about past sins, forebodings about occasions of future sin and temptations, perplexity about what to do and what not to do in order to become a devout priest, practical doubts about the obligations of daily life—for all such miseries here is an adviser apt to possess clear knowledge, a director of souls, a guide through devious ways. And these physicians of souls are specialists, trained by long study and perfected by years of experience; and above all endowed from on high with sacramental wisdom.

When God gains the heart of man all his life is going to be cleansed of stains and stripped of superfluities. When the cry of fire! fire! is heard in a house, how quickly do we save the furniture, beginning with the most precious pieces. So when the fear of God begins inwardly

to burn, instantly all that is not God feels the fire eating into it; if this is true of the fear of God, it is much more so when the fire is the all-consuming love of God.

Herein one discovers the full meaning of the often-mentioned virtue of simplicity, which is a word derived from the Latin adjective *simplex,* that is to say single, undivided. A soul spiritually simple is one that looks straight to God in all things done or omitted, without any admixture of self-interest, vain glory, pleasure or aversion; it has been defined as that singleness of aim which looks only to God in love.

And yet after all, the basis of fidelity in little things, besides supernatural grace, is very largely sound reason and natural virtue. Listen to Cardinal Newman: "I really fear, when we come to examine, that it will be found that there is nothing we resolve, nothing we do, nothing we do not do, nothing we avoid, nothing we choose, nothing we give up, nothing we pursue, which we should not resolve, and do, and not do, and avoid, and choose and give up, and pursue, if Christ had not died and heaven were not promised us; and yet the Apostle insists, 'if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable'" (1 Cor. xv, 19).

The Priest's Account of Conscience

O my God, I beg of Thee to give me an unright intention, an unfeigned purpose to deal frankly with Thee. If I do justice to others, why not to God? He is my Creator, I owe Him all—all that I am is His. He is my Redeemer: my Eternal welfare is wholly the gift of Jesus. Would that my heart were cleared and cleansed of every motive but God my Creator, God my Redeemer; in that case I

should be acting entirely under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

What is an upright intention? One that goes right up to Heaven and to God.—Now that is my general tendency; but it is too often a vague feeling; it has so many exceptions that there are many days when the exceptions prove by their number that the rule is not kept. I do not go contrary to God without remorse and repentance; but God alone! God alone! Alas that is a test which condemns me as a laggard:—I serve God and my own pleasures, my own interests, my own vanity, my own aversions. Only after a bitter conflict am I wholly pure of heart towards God.

O my Lord Jesus Christ, who didst live and die for our salvation, having that motive absolutely unified with Thy Father's glory, grant me to live and die, to act and speak and think, ever and always out of reverence for thy Sovereign Majesty, and of love for Thy divine bounty: Holy Spirit inspire me with this motive in all my conduct. The veil of the ancient ark of the covenant was twice dyed: and my actions must be saturated with God, His might and His wisdom and His love. Nothing less than repeated exercises of piety having in view the purifying of my motives can make me right-minded towards God—at any rate I must not be moved *consciously* by any motive but God.

My faith is faith in God, not in a family inheritance—it is not a mere racial trait;—such motives are of value no otherwise than as the satin casting in which rests my chalice when not in use. Hope is not in anything but the loving kindness of Jesus for poor sinners, "of whom I am the chief" (I Tim. i, 15). I do not trust in any-

thing but that—not in my state of life, not in devotional feelings.

Holy practices, the special favor of the saints: these only encourage me to go straight on to Jesus: they clean my heart and they rectify its intentions. Let me admit candidly that I am too often actuated by sentimentalism. I am on fire with phosphorus: it burns and I think I burn. The real inner fire of sorrow for sin is full of pain for shameful misdeeds; that of love for God is full of pain because hurt by the presence of rival loves. May God and man bear witness that from this day forth I will strive to earn the Blessedness attached by Jesus to simplicity of Heart.

If *love of relatives* must be in my heart, that love must be cleansed by the fire of renunciation. It is a commonplace in the doctrine of Christ that man must be and act so suspicious of love of parents as to seem to hate them —"unless a man hate his father and mother" (Luke xiv, 26). I promise with absolute sincerity fully to appreciate the wisdom of this suspicious attitude and to act accordingly I love them: yet I am a pilgrim and a stranger to them. Mine is the priesthood of a pilgrim Church.

CHAPTER XII

The Priest's Conversation; and His Recreation

Some Words of Scripture:

"Blessed is the man who has not slipped by a word of his mouth."—(Ecclus. xiv, 1.)

"He that walketh sincerely, walketh confidently."—(Prov. x, 9.)

"Come, children, hearken to me: Who is the man that desireth life, who loveth to see goods days? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile."—(Psalm xxxiii, 12-14.)

"Before thou hear, answer not a word; and interrupt not others in the midst of their discourse."—(Ecclus. xi, 8.)

"Young man scarcely speak in thy own cause."—(Ecclus. xxxii, 10.)

"And if thou see a man of understanding, go to him early in the morning, and let thy foot wear the steps of his doors."—(Ecclus. vi, 36.)

IS conversation for its own sake one of the lost arts? Which of us has ever enjoyed what St. Augustine (Confessions, Bk. iv, ch. viii) tells of: "It was the talk, the laughter, the courteous mutual deference, the common study of the masters of eloquence, the comradeship now grave, now gay, the differences that left no

sting, as if of a man differing with himself, the spice of disagreement which seasoned the monotony of consent. Each by turns would instruct or listen; the absent were always missed, the present always welcome. Such tokens springing from the hearts of mutual friends, and displayed by a word, a glance an expression, by a thousand little complacencies, supplying the heat which welds souls together, and makes one of many." But if we can hardly aspire to emulate St. Augustine's circle in everything, we can often enjoy in conversation not only a harmless but a delicious recreation; this depends on avoiding certain notorious faults. If our talk be kindly, humorous and deferential, though it be not the very tree of holy fraternal affection, it may be like an orchid, a beautiful parasite. I have spoken of kindliness; St. Teresa names among her maxims certain negative qualities of conversation:

"Always speak well of spiritual persons, such as religious, priests and hermits."

"Talk little when with many people."

"Never ridicule anything."

"Accommodate yourself to everyone's humor."

"Do not exaggerate, but state your opinion humbly."

"Never affirm anything of the truth of which you are uncertain."

"Unless charity requires, do not obtrude your opinion unasked."

Make up your mind definitely to restrain a natural tendency (shall I call it talent?) to raillery—confine yourself to harmless fun making. Repress every desire to raise a laugh at another's expense. Never was a truer word than Faber's: "From the beginning of the world till now, sarcasm has seldom been less than a venial sin."

What seem to be no better than nervous susceptibilities should none the less be religiously repeated. The extreme of prudence, the perfection of charity, should be your rule. What may be called an instinctive circumspection is soon learned by a kind heart. Before now priests of no great learning, or eloquence, have proved themselves worthy of the mitre, because, having charity and tact they knew how to govern their tongues; whilst certain abler men and finer preachers were ready gossipers. Never join in ecclesiastical gossip; never circulate petty (least of all grievous) clerical scandal. Be absolutely and independently neutral in all diocesan dissensions. Have never a single word to say about promotions, or divisions of parishes. Be extremely ready to speak well of all bishops, especially of your own. Exhibit *positive* good will towards Vicar Generals, or other diocesan officials. All this seems to involve irksome restraint; but if steadfastly adhered to it soon becomes easy, and as it were natural; and with a distinctly religious motive it is a notable super-natural achievement. And your own reputation is made immune from meddlers—you being kindly and indulgent towards all.

Fraternal admonitoin is commonly resented. Almost our only open door to a priest's heart is our reputation for kindness; and our good example. Precept has no place among equals unless preceded by edifying example. Need I say that things heard in confession—however humorous, even when no names are mentioned, should be absolutely tabood. "See, therefore brethren, that you walk [and talk] circumspectly" (Eph. v, 15); our rule is "The charity of God and the patience of Christ" (2 Thes. iii, 5). Let it be said of you: "Surely he cannot

help knowing every ugly thing in the diocese, yet he never says an ugly word of any one near or far."

Who has given me the right to amuse a group of friends at the expense of one who is absent? Detraction spiced with a criticism is like poison enveloped in a sweet capsule; it gets a quicker welcome. On the other hand the more numerous the conversational foot-pads the greater the merit of the rescue of their victim; and the antidote of kindly protest and defence is the more efficacious.

As to downright lying, that, let us hope, is seldom perpetrated. But duplicity, dissembling, and every degree of insincerity always betray a low grade of character. St. Francis de Sales is quoted: "He used to say that to equivocate, was, in his opinion to cannonize lying; and that simplicity was, after all, the best kind of shrewdness. The children of darkness, he added, use cunning and artifice in their dealings with one another, but the children of light should take for their motto the words, 'He that walketh sincerely, walketh confidently'" (Prov. x, 9).

A good test of the tone and spirit of priestly conversation is this: There should be no conversation among priests in which a religious topic would seem to be out of place. If we are but dimly conscious that God is present and is a loving Father, then to speak about Him and His saints will be especially refreshing and enjoyable.

I need recreation. I am not a recluse. I have no vocation to solitude. I need relaxation, physical and spiritual. Agreed I must not, indeed, unship the rudder, but my ship cannot safely carry full sail in all weather. I need recreation. But let me own that I am liable to take too much; to go off on long trips; all alone among all sorts

of people; tempted to throw off the Roman collar (which is unshipping the priestly rudder); and to go about in disguise. The priest's recreation is therefore a delicate subject. With a bright conscience, however, one easily guides himself wisely.

Relaxation of mental strain is readily gained by a modicum of lighter reading—not newspapers, for these take more attention than they bestow relaxation. St. Philip Neri after a busy day used to prepare for sleep by reading amusing books. Again, many priests relieve the strain of vocational duties by taking a class in the parish school. Not a few are rested from the study involved in preparing sermons by keeping a garden and cultivating flowers and vegetables. The better sort of fiction forms the playground of many a weary brain; and one's favorite poets will entertain the imagination and at the same time generate a most useful facility for that figurative style so necessary in public discourse.

Buy a kit of tools for the littler repairs about the house, school and church:—one learns how to use them by a few experiments. Owini was a holy monk in Saxon England of whom St. Bede the Venerable tells. He had in his early days been the first official in the court of the queen. But responding to a vocation to perfection he quietly put off his fine apparel and put on a peasant's clothes; and then he went to the monastery of Lestingay, holding in his hands an axe and a hatchet, to signify that he came there to be a workman and not an idler; which purpose he made good all his long and holy life in the monastic state. St. Ephrem in a sermon addressed to young monks advises them to write at the head of their book these words: "Sloth banished forever and ever from my soul."

Every man needs at least an hour's outing every day in the fresh air; in no wise so well attained as by a daily "constitutional." Let this be secured by claiming the time from the vapors of the pipe or cigar. I have quoted St. Bede and St. Ephrem in favor of manual industry. Generations before them St. Ignatius the martyr *prescribed* it to his priests; St. Clement of Alexandria did the same. What layman, be he day laborer or millionaire, but is all the prouder of his pastor if he sees him working with tools; or handling the spade in his garden. This is only adhering to a Hebrew tradition of many centuries that every man should be able to earn his own living by manual labor; this caused St. Paul to be busy at a weaver's loom, whilst he evangelized what holy Church calls "the whole world." He said in bidding farewell to the faithful of Ephesus: "For you yourselves know, that for such things as were needful to me and them that are with me, these hands have furnished" (Acts iv, 34); and the same he said elsewhere:—(1 Cor. iv, 12; 2 Thes. iii, 8).

In the life of St. Antony the hermit we read that he was once much distressed and discouraged about his salvation. And he said to God: "Lord how shall I be saved?" And then rising up, he went out; and he saw a man sitting on the ground working at weaving baskets and mats; and then presently rising up and praying; but after a time returning to his work again. And so this man continually exchanged manual work for prayer. And then Antony heard an angel's voice saying to him. "Do thus, and thou shalt be saved." And ever afterwards he adopted that order of life with much joy, and taught disciples accordingly.

Social recreation should be confined to one's clerical

brethren, whose company should be cultivated. All neighboring priests should be invited to visit you. These should be specially invited to meet the bishop when he makes you an official visit. But visiting with the laity socially should be *strictly avoided*. Each family in the parish is met at the annual house to house visitation; that makes sure of personal acquaintance. Such recreations as "dining out" or "spending an evening" with a family always causes remark, breeds gossip, and often arouses jealousy on the part of the unvisited. Meanwhile, in time of illness and of trouble one makes sure of calling.

As to games, if these are private, or intercollegiate, the coast is clear. But big professional games—our priests (let me dare to say it) should be conspicuous by their absence. Theatres and Moving Pictures—have the prudence (shall I say the humility) to 'phone the Ordinary for his guidance.

As to summer vacation, public resorts should be avoided rigidly, especially those at the seaside; a little inquiring will discover private opportunities for sea bathing.

The rule that is the test of all our recreations is this: we priests should be apart from the laity during our hours of relaxation. Another test is revealed by a choice between two maxims. One is this: Recreate when you can, work when you must. The other is: Work when you can, recreate when you must.

What about drinking? Our American custom for many years back has not favored drinking as something appropriate to hospitality; and finally it has banished it almost totally from our dining tables. The inner perils of moderate drinking are a sanguine temperament; a

sluggish temperament; a convivial temperament; a natural tendency to excess. As to outer perils, who does not know that drunkards are made by adversity; by prosperity; by overwork; by drinking as a pastime; just for some occasion; or to escape ridicule. The inner perils and the outer ones are sure to come together, unless carefully kept apart. Nowadays no priest is thought to be an oddity if he makes an iron rule excluding drink totally.

Our leisure has its gospel rules as well as our labor. Savings banks are required by law to invest the people's money in what are called gilt edge securities; such as are convertible into spot cash regardless of hard times or fluctuations on exchange—absolutely safe. Now a priest is the savings bank of the people's *time;* every minute of his time belongs to them; his recreations no less than his priestly labors are to be invested in absolutely safe securities.

CHAPTER XIII

The Priest's Death

THE motto of this chapter may well be the following act of resignation indulgenced by Pope Pius X:

"My Lord God, even now, resignedly and willingly, I accept at Thy hands, with all its anxieties, pains, and sufferings, whatever kind of death it shall please Thee to be mine."

St. Boniface, surnamed the Apostle of Germany, had spent his earlier priestly life a missionary to idolators. When he had converted several nations of them, and had stationed priests among them, he established their hierarchy, of which the Pope appointed him the Metropolitan. Being at last advanced in years, his soul burnt again with its youthful missionary ardor. He resigned his see; and with a number of priests he made his way to a half-savage tribe still sunk in idolatry; and establishing a mission there he made many converts. But one day a band of heathens burst upon him and his priests and slew them one and all. A rescue party found him with a book in his hands sprinkled with his blood; it was a copy of St. Ambrose' treatise, *De Bono Mortis*—the advantages of Death. The holy missionary had explored those advantages; he had got what he had come for, what he ever had longed for, what he had daily pondered on when each time, like every priest, he had commemorated the death of Christ in holy Mass, and forecast his own death. Mass and the divine office mean many great

things; but nothing so sacredly as they mean the call of death: "Behold my Beloved; He standeth behind our wall, looking through the windows, looking through the lattices, Behold my Beloved speaketh to me: Arise make haste, My love, My dove, My beautiful one and come" (Cant. ii, 9, 10). The Church's at None, supposed to have been composed by the same St. Ambrose, and recited daily as the evening sun is shining, *"Rerum Deus, tenax vigor,"* is thus translated by Cardinal Newman:

O God unchangeable and true,
Of all the life and power,
Dispensing light in silence through
Every successive hour;

Lord brighten our declining day,
That it may never wane,
Till death, when all things round
Brings back the morn again.

This grace on Thy redeem'd confer,
Father, Co-equal Son,
And Holy Ghost, the Comforter
Eternal Three in one. *Amen.*

Newman's translation is perfect; yet it loses some of the force of the latinity of the original in the middle verse:

Largire lumen vespere,
Quo vita nusquam decidat,
Sed praemium mortis sacrae
Perennis instet gloria.

What must be Our Lord's interest in my death—His

priest; what His joy, what His triumph. His Transfiguration was in its splendor the forecast of His resurrection, yet on Tabor He discoursed with Moses and Elias on "the decease which He was to undergo at Jerusalem" (Luke ix, 20). Whosoever receives communion is soothed and solaced at the thought of death, for it is his transfiguration with his Savior. What then should be said of a priest, who offers Holy Mass every day. Courage to face death with joy is what ought to be the priest's instinctive grace. That should not be a terror to us which is a joy to Christ and His angels. "The body feels no pain when the soul has given itself wholly to God," wrote St. Cyprian to certain Christians awaiting martyrdom. A true pilgrim gladly looks forward to his home coming. "Since our Savior gave His death agony to be the cause of our joy I cannot feel any bitterness at the thought of my own death or that of any dear friend" (*Spirit of St. Francis de Sales,* p. 462). When St. John Berchmans was sent to the infirmary incurably ill, he blessed his bed, calling it his couch of joy.

St. Paul wrote: "From henceforth let no man be troublesome to me, for I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body" (Gal. vi, 17). These death prints were, perhaps, invisible to all but himself, as in later ages was the case with St. Catherine of Siena. But interiorly not so; for he affirmed: "That I may live to God, with Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Gal. ii, 19). And his recital of his particular inspiration of the Eucharist contains some words bearing directly upon our theme of the joys of death: "For as often as you shall eat this bread and drink the chalice, you shall show forth the death of the Lord until He come" (1 Cor. xi, 26). By assimilat-

ing this I and every priest may taste a sovereign joy in our sojourn on earth. For in all eternity my sovereign joy shall be identically the same gladness as that of a happy death. How great should be my joy over that event which opens the gates of heaven to me.

All honor to death. It emancipates love; it begins my soul's freedom to love without limit; it pays love's debt, and God's quittance and receipt in full is written by my divine Creditor in His blood. Hence the apostle's loud claim in face of earth and heaven: "I die daily" (1 Cor. xv, 31).

We priests are essentially officials of Christ's death and resurrection—on our altar we are living attendants upon a dead and risen Man-God. We are men of *a* death —of *the* death.

What is the Christian Priesthood? What is the Christian Church? The Institution founded by God to show forth death. What death? The death of God at Jerusalem. To whom? To the whole world—in every corner of the world. For how long? Till all men have each in turn died. Again, what death? The death that goes before Eternal life. "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall live also together with Christ" (Rom. vi, 18).

Let us do justice to death, correcting our panic fears of it without injury to rational fear; nor should we fear illness as leading to death; nor be overwhelmed with grief at the death of friends. In Lent our people get full treatment of death's lessons, closing at Easter with their triumph over death. Let us not feel above their state of mind; yet let us refine our feelings as becomes the leaders of the people. No man lives who is so easily

death's master as a priest—an enemy of panic fear, a heathen's dread, nervous, scrupulous terror. The priest assisting at the Christian's deathbed with Christ's sacraments, and on the altar presiding at the Christian's burial, is death's master. The priest's own death—it seems incredible to his people that a priest should ever die, so easily is he death's master.

Thus it seemed incredible to the apostles that their Master should die. When Our Lord foretold His death to them, St. Peter taking Him apart "began to rebuke Him, saying: Lord be it far from Thee, this shall not be unto Thee" (Matt. xvi, 23). But Jesus chided him severely, and very soon after He was transfigured before them (Matt. xvii, 1-5). There upon Tabor, as I have already noticed, all resplendent with glory He discoursed with Moses and Elias of "the decease which He was to accomplish at Jereusalem—not of His resurrection and ascension but of His frightful agony, and His betrayal, His death struggle before Pilate, His three hours on the cross—His death. His glory on Tabor anticipated by Mass, the Rite by which His death was most joyfully to be perpetuated by priests, everywhere, and to the end of time when He shall come again in eternal glory. Thus the common ground of all His truth and love was His death; and the same is to be said of His prophets as well as His ancient law; and His amazing Sacrament of love was and is death, His death. If any prophet or any apostle had but one brief hour to speak to me of my life and career he would devote it all to the death I was destined to die; just as Jesus does when He gives me the awful privilege of saying Mass. My death shall fix my lot just as His death fixed His lot. Death is to be

the meeting point of all past and future for me as it was for Him. It is therefore appropriate to recall St. Paul's own feelings about his own death: "With Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Gal. ii, 19).

I began this chapter with the death of St. Boniface, martyred holding in his hand St. Ambrose's book *De Bono Mortis*. When, ages before St. Boniface, the author of that book knew that his time had come he seems to have felt certain forebodings. But he suppressed them, saying to his associates: "My life among you has not been disedifying; and I know that I shall meet a merciful judge." Listen to a woman's courage. St. Teresa says: "Believe me, Sisters, the battle never comes soon enough for the soldiers of the cross" (Way of Perfection, xxxviii, 1). Forecasting death, therefore, which of us may not in his darkest hour say to God: "O by Thy loving kindness, tell me, O Lord, what Thou art unto to me. Say unto my soul, "I am thy salvation" (Ps. xviii, 13, 14),—at thy death.

Dreaming of our future temptations, and realizing our former cowardice, we tremble and we say to ourselves: when the inevitable trial comes on I will again basely yield to the enemy. But bear this in mind: some soldiers have looked forward to battle with confidence, and when face to face with the enemy have basely yielded; whilst others who trembled before the conflict, have fought valiantly in the hour of danger.

St. Vincent de Paul in the latter part of his life, finding his health decaying recited every day after Mass the prayers of the Church for the dying with the recommendation of the soul departing, together with other preparatory devotions for the dread event.

When at last the fateful hour shall arrive and the choice of thinking on my past life in contrast with my future one shall be forced upon me, surely I will echo St. Paul's words: "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended. But one thing I do; forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii, 13, 14).

A certain good priest falling dangerously ill showed signs of positive joy. When chided for this he answered: "We blame those who strive to prolong the trial of a case at law and would postpone a final judgment. Why then seek to delay that judgment of the just Judge with which the trial of this life shall be closed? We must certainly die; and it is very doubtful whether we shall fare better in the end if it be postponed in any, even the least degree."

St. Augustine had a saying: "He is the truest Christian who tolerates life but loves death."

Our Lord asks our pity for a man who having begun to build a house could not finish it: "This man began to build and was not able to finish" (Luke xiv, 30). Well, then, O Lord, shalt Thou allow Thyself to begin my house of eternal joy and then subject Thyself to the ridicule of the very demons for failing to complete it by Thy grace of a good death? Shall it be said even of Thee "He began to build and could not finish."

St. Aloysius, in thanksgiving for his death being very near, recited the *Te Deum* with a brother scholastic at his bedside. Years ago I offered the requiem Mass for a pious Christian; and when the prayers over the coffin

were ended the choir, to my great wonder, chanted the *Te Deum*—it was sung by special request of the departing Christian in the last hour of life. St. Gregory the Great says the same of his sister St. Thrasilla.

Be sure, O thou anxious priest, that thy distress about thy final perseverance is but a little cloud compared to the deep gloom thy Savior felt whilst He agonized in the Garden about thy eternal fate and writhed in His death throes on Calvary. Be sure that if thou art true to Him he will be true to thee unto the end.

Of a good Christian who was very near death this is told. The priest said to him: "Do you wish for anything?" He answered: "Read something for me on the love of Jesus Christ." O how truly said was that word! And how unwise are they who remind a dying Christian —especially a priest—of the virtues and merits of his life. He does not thank you for that but only for words about Jesus Crucified, by whose death alone we are saved. Thus may we fulfill the exhortation of the Holy Spirit: "Be not afraid to be justified even unto death" (Ecclus. xviii, 22).

O dearest Savior, I am looking sadly, despondently towards the end. Shall I then be good, even as pitifully good as I am now? It is for Thee to say. O my Savior, with all my faults there is some good in me, especially the awesome and timid love I bear Thee. O it is for Thee to turn this feeling and all my other good feelings into eternal resolutions of love.

In his last illness St. Philip Neri suffered bleeding of the lungs. As the blood first came forth the dying saint gazed on it with emotion; and his thoughts went back to his earlier days when he had ardently longed to preach

Christ to the heathens and die a martyr. And now he said: "Praised be God, that I can at least in some way give Him back blood for blood."

The following account of the last moments of Father John Morris, an English Jesuit, holy and zealous for souls, who died some twenty years ago, is edifying and quite illustrative of our theme. He had ascended the pulpit intending to preach on the gospel of the Sunday. He pronounced the words: "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," when he suddenly stopped. An expression on his face told of a supreme struggle within. He grasped the front of the pulpit with spasmodic energy, and with an immense effort completed the great sentence: "and to God the things that are God's." Then he fell back dead into the arm of two men who had rushed up the pulpit steps; whilst the priest in the sanctuary pronounced upon him the last absolution. Surely you could not choose more appropriate words for your own departure; they mean, my body to the dust that forms it, my soul to the God who owns it. Such had truly been the death thought of the English martyrs under Elizabeth and James, to preserving whose memory in literary work Father John Morris had devoted the best years of his life.

"God prolongs our life that we may continue to weep for our ingratitude for having offended Him," says Alban Butler. And when perfect penance has been done, He yet prolongs it that refinement of motives and absorption of "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. ii, 16), may give us a higher crown in heaven.

Consider the sacred rubrics and vestments of our departure: St. Francis of Assisi would be vested in a habit of his order; he begged a cast off one; and he would be

laid on the earth strewn with ashes. Cardinal Wiseman would be vested in his bishop's robes and he departed reciting the *Credo*. And St. Vincent with his dying breath recited the *Credo*. St. Augustine recited the *Miserere*. Every Christian holds in his dying clasp a lighted candle, typical of his Credo. Every priest's corpse is vested for Holy Mass as he lies in his coffin.

It is lawful to compare the thoughts of our angel guardian with our own, at the moment in which his life-long task is done. How vivid a contrast all through life, but especially now. He has always drunk and now drinks of the waters of Life at the very fountain I only now and then and in little sips, with a hand that tremblingly spills those precious drops. He lives unchangeably forever, eating and drinking of the celestial food that is God. I eat and drink of the dust of the earth, sauced only with ugly hunger, excessive, deordinate, and I am to be changed by rotting into my very food. I eat and drink it quickly lest in my mouth it rot and crumble into dust: and I am no better than my food. The light of the sun is dim to me, and it will soon be quenched, but his light is God's unsetting day. Yet my eyes shall one day behold *that* noon-day sun as clearly as he.

Traders make gain by trading goods for goods, or money for goods, or goods for money. I am a barterer; my coin is dust, my gain is heaven. My angel cannot say as much. If "for me to live is Christ," *now* "to die is gain" (Phil. i, 21).

It must be a deep wonder to my angel that my death breeds life. If angels can have mysteries, this is one of them. Dear angel, I have a privilege which thou canst not have: *I can die*. Thou canst not share with

Christ the Son of the Living God His supreme glory of Calvary, as I am sure to do. He is King of the angels but still more my King, because He became a man and not an angel, lived as a man, died as a man.

Certain forebodings of death are of value, even if the result of nervousness. When the turn of the year comes, if a priest could give a day to some special exercises of religion, saying to himself that what may be shall be, trying to realize that perhaps I am now beginning the last year of my life—such thoughts would serve him an eternal purpose. Just as attending at the deathbed of a beloved friend serves him an eternal purpose. St. Jane Frances de Chantal had a practice of now and then whispering *Amen,* in order thus to join in all the acts of love and praise of God which the angels in heaven and the just upon earth offer to Him without intermission. But what is a good priest's death but his *Amen* to all the good acts of the servants of Christ—but especially to all his own.

Newman says: "We know how men feel and act when they come to die. This world is nothing to them. It may praise, it may blame; but they feel it not. They are leaving their goods, their deeds, their sayings, their writings, their names behind them; and they care not for it all, for they wait for Christ. To one thing alone they are alive, His coming. They watch against it, if so be they may then be found without shame. Such is the conduct of dying men; and what all but the very hardened do at the last, if their senses fail not and their powers hold,—now that does the true Christian do all his life long. He is even dying while he lives; he is on his bier, and the prayers for the dying are being said over him.

He has no work but making his peace with God, and preparing for the Judgment." If this be true of all, O how essentially true it is of a good priest.

The same great writer shall give us our final word: "May God support us all the day long, till the shades lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done! Then in His mercy may He give us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at last!"

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A Retreat for Priests.
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